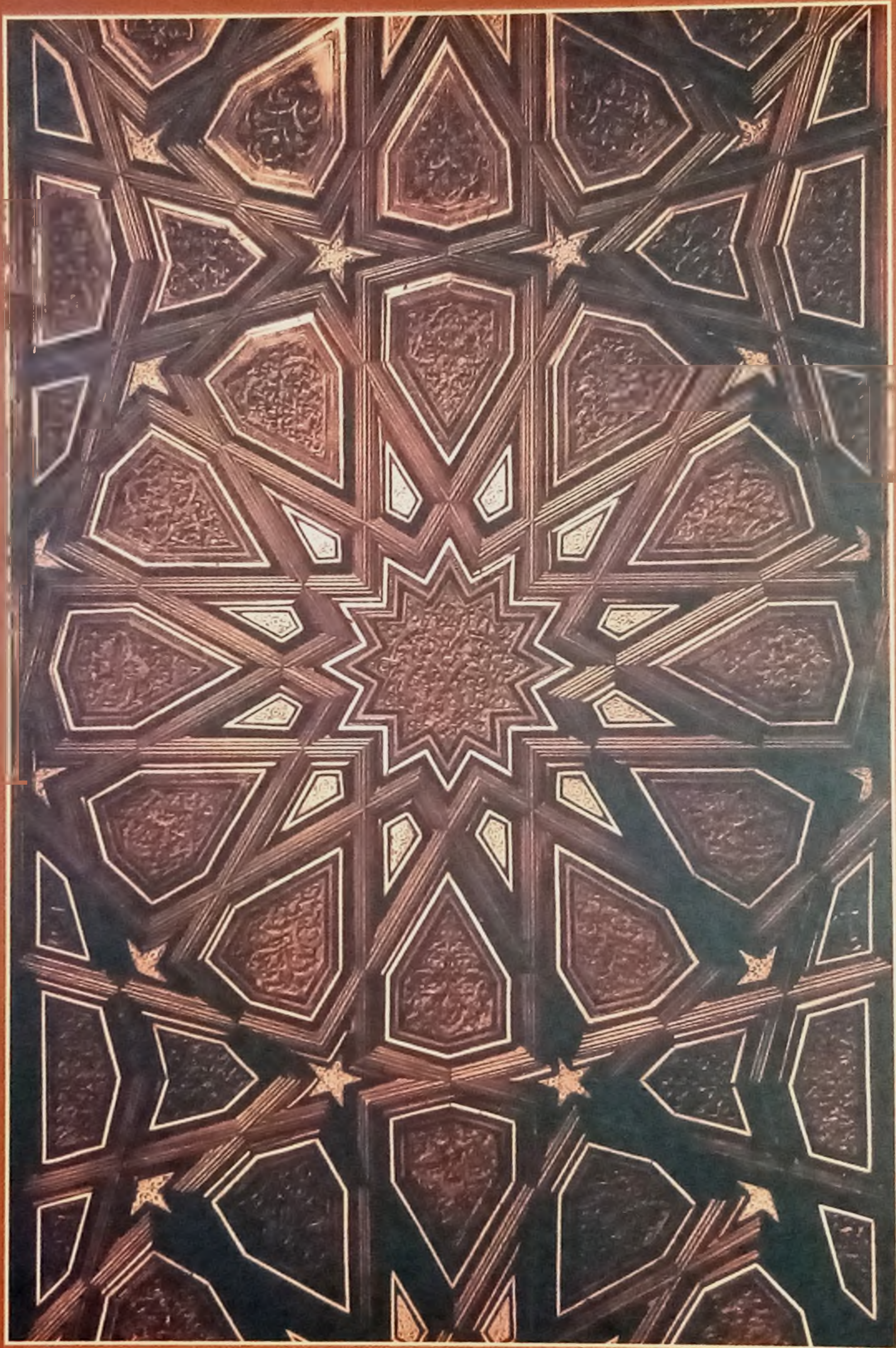


WALKING IN FOOTSTEPS  
*on the Need for a Spiritual Teacher*



TALIB AL-HABIB



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*on the Need for a Spiritual Teacher*

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Walking in Footsteps

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I give thanks first, foremost and ultimately to Almighty Allah for favoring me with membership – at least in name – of the blessed fellowship of his beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. May all of us remain steadfast upon his way, live in his love and die with the vision of him.

To my shaykh, who teaches me and guides me in ways that I cannot explain or even understand. His words are like brief, piercing flashes of lightning; the thunder of their profound meaning echoes in the soul only much later. There are lessons he has taught me whose secret meanings will continue to reveal themselves to me until my life's end. To my parents and brother Reyhan, who made me what I am and pointed me towards what I may yet become. May I yet make them proud.

To my wife Nazima, uncomplainingly patient through all my long absences for research and writing. Her efforts go unsung and often unnoticed, but in truth she is the steady foundation without which I could have built or achieved nothing. And to my children, Noor-un-Nisaa and Tahseen Zaynab, who have taught me with their very lives the secret of the mureed's relationship to the peer and of man's relationship to Allah.

To all those who have helped me, taught me and remained patient with all my questions, especially Hafiz Fuzail Soofie, who proof-read this book and offered valuable suggestions. Also to Sidi Gibril Haddad and Mufti Naseem Ashraf al-Habibi, who also proof-read the book and whose vast learning has enriched me tremendously. Thanks also to all the scholars whose words I have repeated – I hope they may be pleased with my remembrance of them.

Lastly, but only to emphasize his importance, to my beloved



Prophet ﷺ, at whose gate I am a beggar hoping for crumbs, whose life and life-after-death are incalculable blessings for me and for all Muslims. May I learn to love him in the manner that his perfection and beauty deserve, and may he favor me with his kind gaze and radiant smile on that Day when I will be lost, alone and fearful. May peace and blessings be upon him, his companions, his family, his ummah, my shaykh and all the auliya-allah. And our final word is praise and glory to Allah, Lord of the heavens and the earth; the Creator of the souls and Knower of their secrets.

## FOREWORD

Tasawwuf or Sufism – as it is popularly known – is the term applied to the Islamic religious quest. Tasawwuf and Islam cannot be separated. Islam is not an historical phenomenon that began 1400 years ago. It is the timeless art of spiritual awakening by means of submission to the Almighty. Tasawwuf is the heart of Islam – as ancient as the rise of human consciousness. Ibn al-Farid a great Sufi, stresses that Tasawwuf lies behind and before systemization, that ‘our wine existed before what you call the grape and the vine (the school and the system)’:

*We drank to the mention of the Friend,  
Intoxicating ourselves, even before the creation of the vine.*

Islam in its fullest sense consists of three planes— surrender or submission (islām in the narrower sense of the word), faith (imān) and excellence (ihsān). The inevitable movement from concentrated synthesis in the era of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his companions, to differentiated analysis, saw the plane of islām crystallize into the different schools of canon law, imān into scholastic theology and ihsān into Tasawwuf.

Ihsan denotes the ultimate goal of the Islamic religious quest and has been described by the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as: “It is that you should worship God as if you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, then (know that) He sees you.”

To worship Allāh ‘as if you are seeing Him’ doesn’t merely indicate a series of acts, but a perpetual state – a perpetual state of remembrance of Allāh. Thus, Tasawwuf is dedicated to the ideal of the ‘Ascent of man to Allāh’. To achieve this state some form of spiritual guidance and method is indispensable. The Holy Prophet



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(peace be upon him) taught on four levels, which in Sufi parlance are popularly known as: Al-Shariah, Al-Tariqah, Al-Ma`rifah and Al-Haqiqah. They don't imply four different philosophies or ways of life, but only four stages in the life and experience of a genuine pursuer of the Islamic religious quest.

In this short treatise, Talib al-Habib has made an admirable effort to introduce a novice to the experiential dimension of Islam, and to the true "inheritors of the prophets" – those 'ulama, who have been imbued with the four levels of religious experience, and have achieved mastery in the transference of this knowledge to the hearts of sincere seekers. It is hoped that this book will inspire in a novice the confidence to pursue the path to reality. May Allāh reward him for his noble endeavour, and may he continue to work sincerely for the sake of Allāh.

Hafez Muhammad Fuzail Soofie Al-Habibi

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the book, 'Walking in Footsteps', Talib al-Habib has offered a detailed and well-researched but easy to understand introduction to the concepts of tasawwuf and peeri-mureedi. Its references are authentic and he clearly puts forward the views of the great scholars of Islam on these issues. With its help, one can discover the Sufi way and uplift his spirituality under the guidance of a shaykh.

In this regard, my advice to those interested is to keep studying Islamic history and the lifestyles of the Holy Prophet, his sahaba and the pious servants of Allah. By this, one will be granted a spiritual link with the pious predecessors. He should also refrain from bad company and from an environment that will deter him from spiritual progress. May Allah accept the efforts of Talib al-Habib and grant readers the taufiq to be firm on the path of the Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jamaah and strictly follow the rules of the shari`ah.

Mufti Naseem Ashraf al-Habibi

Habibi Darul Ifta

Centre for Islamic Research and Advice



Indeed, there are numerous books on Islam and Sufism, but every era and every age poses its own unique combination of challenges peculiar to its contextual diversity. Hence there will always be a need for people endowed with the knowledge and zeal in every era to respond to these intellectual challenges.

Our present millennium is indeed an 'age of doubt,' where issues that were non-issues in the past era are now being questioned



and challenged. Talib al-Habib belongs to the new young crop of intellectuals, who respond to the current challenges with an incisive and clear mind. This book, which centers on the theme of The Need for a Spiritual Guide, is a must for any sincere Muslim. He presents his arguments in clear logical sequence, backed by the Qur'an, Prophetic Traditions, A`immah of the past, and scientific clarity.

If read with an open mind, the reader will be awakened - although not if read with a closed mind or preconceptions. It is highly recommended reading in a world that is only slowly awakening to the value of a mentor in the corporate, political and scientific world.

Rafeek Hassan  
Director,  
Department of Da`wah,  
Islamic Propagation Centre International.

## PREFACE

*In the name of Allah, boundlessly compassionate, boundlessly merciful. All praise be to Allah, Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds; and everlasting peace and salutations be upon our master Muhammad, his purified family and his blessed companions, upon the saints of his community and all those who love and follow him; and may we be numbered among them.*

This work has been long in the forging. It was begun at the request of my beloved shaykh nearly two years ago. He had smiled when he asked me to write 'a few pages about peeri-mureedi,' and I am beginning to understand why! It has truly been a journey of discovery, with many surprises along the way. My own, unspoken questions have been answered (as my shaykh surely realized when he set me to this task) and I have emerged wiser, stronger in my faith and (hopefully) humbler. The whole soul-building experience was sufficient reward for two years of research, but I am glad to be able to share the results of my learning with my respected readers.

This book is divided into two parts; the first will look into the necessity of a spiritual guide. There are two methods for justifying any particular point of view - firstly, to examine the proofs for it, and secondly, to critically analyse the arguments against it. Thus we will explore the proofs of peeri-mureedi based on the four primary levels of justification accepted in Islamic Jurisprudence: Qur'an, Sunnah, 'Ijma (consensus of scholars) and Qiyas (logical analogy). We will also address some of the common objections raised to it and examine their validity and consistency with the principles of Islam.

The second portion of this book will be devoted to what is required of the seeker after he or she has pledged their hand to a shaykh. Here we will be specifically looking into the principles of aadaab (etiquette of discipleship) that the honour of the shaykh



demands, and the nature of the relationship between master and pupil. Rather than simply enumerate a list of rules and masaa'il, we hope to look deeper, to the principles that underlie the bond. After all, this is a connection based on unbounded love and deep respect – it is in fact the beginning point of our relationship with Allah. In such a state, correct conduct should come naturally and not be forced into place.

My beloved peer repeatedly emphasises the need to make any form of teaching, whether oral or written, accessible to its audience. As Sayyidina Ali advised, 'speak to people according to their level, lest you drive them away.' It is keeping this advice in mind, then, that certain steps have been taken to bring the main principles of this book into somewhat sharper focus. It is an unfortunate consequence that this has rendered the book somewhat less than academically proper. It is not, however, a treatise aimed at a University Board or a council of ulama, but rather to bring certain fundamental truths home to the layman.

First and foremost, I have tried to ensure that only the bare minimum information required to justify an argument has been included, along with whatever commentary I have felt is necessary to explain it. As frequently referred to in the following pages, much more could (and has been) said in support of every point raised in this book.

Furthermore, we have included, at the head of each chapter, a short summary that introduces the main thrust of the section. In this we hope that there will be found a two-fold benefit: firstly, to focus the reader's mind and prevent him from losing sight of the chapter's objective. Secondly, to make it more convenient for one who does not wish to go into the details of any particular subject. There is also additional information contained in the appendices which we hope will be of interest to the reader.

Another feature is the inclusion of a complete Biographical Notice. In it, one will find a brief biography of every single scholar whose opinion or work has been cited in this book. This is intended

to assure the reader not only of the authenticity of our sources of knowledge, but more importantly, of the depth of scholarship attained by those upon whom we have relied to base our views. We have taken care to provide the considered judgements of the elite of Islamic scholars over the past fifteen hundred years to back up our arguments. Hopefully, it will also awaken a deep sense of pride in the tremendous learning that Muslims have achieved in their glorious history. It is ulama of this calibre that have moved Islam forward in every era, and whom today are required to set in motion a rebirth of our intellectual heritage. It should also not escape one's notice that nearly all of them were Sufis or their disciples.

Finally, an explanatory note on the terminology used. The spiritual guide has variously been referred to as 'peer' (urdu/persian), 'murshid' (arabic) or 'shaykh' (arabic). These words mean exactly the same thing in this context and are interchangeable; however, the word 'peer' has been favoured simply because it is most commonly used by our (Indian) spiritual elders. The same preference applies to the phrase 'peeri-mureedi'.

In the end, we turn to Almighty Allah in penitence, humility and abjection, seeking His forgiveness, His pleasure and His true guidance. We pray that this small work is acceptable to Him and to His most beloved servant Sayyidina Muhammad ﷺ, the Messenger of mercy and truth. Whatever is true in this book is certainly from Allah Most High, His Prophet ﷺ and His friends; and whatever is false or vain is from my own nafs (lower self).

There is no enabling grace for me except from Allah. Upon Him do I rely and unto Him do I turn in repentance.

Talib al-Habib.

Rabi' al-Awwal, 1423 Hijri.



## INTRODUCTION

*Say, "My prayer and my sacrifice, my life and my death are all for Allah, Lord of the Worlds."¹*

### TASAWWUF AND PEERI-MUREEDI

Tasawwuf is the heart of Islam, the inner dimension of the final revelation from God to mankind. It is the soul that moves it, the vital force that strengthens it, and the breath that sustains it. It encompasses both the fundamentals of Islam as well as the highest expressions of its ultimate reality. Its basis is the divine law, its path is self-realisation, and its purpose is nothing less than absolute knowledge of and unconditional faithfulness to God.

It is, in truth, the high water mark in humanity's long, oft-times frustrating attempt to reach perfection. One who steadfastly holds to its principles will become, insha-allah, a complete human (al-insan al-kamil), the vicegerent of Allah on earth (khilafatullah fi'l ard) and a clear reflection of the personality of Rasulullah ﷺ. He will have realised the ultimate reason for his own existence – the pure worship of Allah in every action and word, motion and silence.

Its historical origins are firmly rooted in the piety and mystical observances of the most blessed Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his righteous companions. From this deep spiritual wellspring does it draw its sustenance, and it takes its light from their lamp. Its fundamentals arise from shari'ah, and they do not deviate one hairs-breadth from its bounds. It has been cherished and nurtured by the holiest and most saintly men and women of every generation

1 al-An'am (6:162)



from the very birth of Islam up to the present day. From the time that Imam al-Ghazali (ra) achieved his remarkable synthesis of the legal and mystical aspects of religion, Islam and tasawwuf have been near-universally considered identical to one another.

Peeri-mureedi<sup>2</sup> is, in turn, the basis of tasawwuf. It is the bond between the master and the pupil, without which progress is impossible. It is a solemn pledge of faithfulness to God and His Messenger ﷺ. It is the chain of God (*habl Allah*) that links the seeker and the sought, the light-filled lantern (*al-siraj al-munira*) that guides through darkness, the faithful handhold that never fails (*al-urwat al-wusqaa la infisama laha*). It is the first step along the path to God, and any further step depends on the integrity of this covenant. Such is its significance that every Sufi master without exception, from the dawn of Islam to present day, has emphasised it as the first and most vital step that a seeker takes. Without peeri-mureedi, there is no tasawwuf. And without tasawwuf, Islam becomes like a dead, hollow tree that any strong wind may topple.

### THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

It is surprising, therefore, that during recent times both peeri-mureedi and tasawwuf have become topics of debate and controversy. As with all controversies, people find themselves divided into three camps – those that hold fast to it, those who oppose it outright, and the confused masses in the middle. And unfortunately, as is usually the case, most on all sides have very little idea of the Islamic arguments for and against.

This modern era bears all the marks of the Dajjalian end-times. Many scholars have noted this, but perhaps the least emphasis is placed on the most important sign of his coming: that virtue and vice have been inverted. Horrendous injustice and atrocious suffering are tolerated with scarcely a whisper of protest. However, we find

<sup>2</sup> This is the Urdu term for what is termed '*nisba wa suhba*' in Arabic - the connecting bond between master and disciple.

that we need to justify and defend that which has, for centuries, been considered not only permissible but also an act of worship.

Contemporary Islamic thought teeters on the edge of a precipice – it has been said that the Muslim world is now enduring its 'Dark Ages'. One of the more noticeable consequences of this is that the Islamic adab of debate and disagreement has been lost. Discussions about Islamic issues often become emotionally-charged affairs, filled with abuse and mutual insults. This is not the way Allah has commanded us to act – it is demeaning to the honour and dignity of Muslims, and presents our faith in an extremely negative light to the rest of humanity. We are, after all, supposed to be the best of all peoples, evolved for mankind's guidance.<sup>3</sup>

It is for this reason that my beloved shaykh has decided to commission this book. It is intended to be a clear, lucid and straightforward exposition explaining the necessity of a spiritual teacher using straight-forward, rational arguments drawn from the authentic sacred texts of Islam. It is designed to be an answer to the following questions: "Why does one need a shaykh? Does the shari'ah permit or enjoin it? What are the Islamic proofs of tasawwuf?" and finally, "What is the etiquette of correct behaviour with the shaykh?"

It is our duty as travelers towards Allah to inform people about the crucial importance of this forgotten dimension of Islam, as well as to encourage them along its path. What we trying to practice is, after all, one of the three fundamentals of the religion – ihsan.<sup>4</sup> As Rasulullah ﷺ has said, "the least (of faith) is to remove an obstacle from peoples' path."<sup>5</sup>

### WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

The connection between peeri-mureedi and tasawwuf is so integral

<sup>3</sup> Sura Aale-Imraan, v 110

<sup>4</sup> al-ihsan: 'to attain beauty'. It will be discussed in detail, insha-allah.

<sup>5</sup> al-Bukhari, Muslim, Bayhaqi's 'Seventy branches of Faith.'



that it would be impossible not to devote a great deal of attention to tasawwuf itself, and the reader will find that much of the first section of the book dwells on the Islamic science of self-purification (*ilm al-ihsan*, *ilm tazkiyyat an-nafs* or *tasawwuf*). As far as possible, though, this book will not look into the practices commonly associated with Sufis such as 'urs, mawlid, sama' and so on. These subjects have been more than adequately covered in many detailed books by both classical mujtahids and contemporary writers. South African readers are referred to an excellent and concise English-language book by Hafiz Fuzail Soofie al-Habibi called "Seeker of the Beloved."

Neither does this book aspire to be a manual of tasawwuf. Great Sufis have written comprehensive and extremely profound analyses of Sufism, exploring its mysteries, states and realities. Far be it from us to attempt to match their level of perception! More importantly, however, the higher realities and secrets of tasawwuf and Islam are not such as can be written on paper or learnt by rote as can the text of the Qur'an or hadith. Divinely gifted faith (*'ilm al-mukashafa*) and spiritual insight (*ma'rifah*) are not the same as practically acquired knowledge (*'ilm al-mu'amala*). One requires a shaykh precisely because the mind cannot comprehend the reality of the spirit.

Readers who are mureeds or well-versed in tasawwuf will also notice that there are surprisingly few quotations from the great Sufi masters, especially in the first section of this book. Their views have been purposefully avoided, not because they are unimportant, but rather so that the 'outside' voices of those ulama not usually associated with tasawwuf can be heard. Suffice to say that every argument in this book is in agreement with the views of the Sufi peers throughout history.

We also wish to state at the outset that this book is not intended to be an attack against any group or person's convictions. There may be places in this book wherein differing opinions are criticised and refuted – this is part and parcel of scholarship. It is not the way of the Sufis, especially the Chishtiyya Habibiyya order, to insult or

degrade any of Allah's creation. We follow the sunnah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, in that we hate wrong-doing, but love the wrong-doer. All of mankind has been honoured by Allah Himself<sup>6</sup>, and assigned His sacred trust. We believe that a man is entitled to hold his own beliefs – for there is no compulsion in religion. However, it does not follow from this that every opinion is either justified or correct.

One will find that most of the misconceptions regarding both peeri-mureedi and tasawwuf arise from an interpretation of Islam that differs markedly from the understanding of the vast majority of scholars throughout the centuries. Rather than simply rebut these erroneous ideas, we will aim to present the correct views as articulated by these great ulama.

In the final analysis, this book is not intended to be a refutation, but rather a clear explanation of the Orthodox Islamic belief concerning peeri-mureedi and tasawwuf as expressed by the classical scholars and luminaries of Islam. If we have inadvertently offended anyone, we ask for their forgiveness. In the end, we pray that Allah Most Merciful guides all of humanity to His eternal peace.

*Wa ma alayna illa'l balagh al-mubin.*  
(And our duty is but clear conveyal)



## SHARI'AH AND TASAWWUF

*In origin, purpose and function, shari'ah and tasawwuf represent the two great dimensions of the Sunnah. Neither can be complete without the other. Through his example, the shaykh teaches the tariqah, the perfection of human qualities, which is the true way to implement the shari'ah in its highest and noblest form.*

Shari'ah and tasawwuf form the two great branches of the Sunnah – one representing its external form; the other, its internal state. Tasawwuf is, therefore, an indispensable factor in the spiritual life of Muslims. To imagine shari'ah without tasawwuf – or vice-versa – is to imagine a coin with only one side: it is an impossibility. The trend among some quarters of the Muslim world to deny or minimize the vital role of tasawwuf (and, by extension, peeri-mureedi) is the one of most dangerous threats to the balance and wholeness of the entire Islamic faith. Consequently, before we begin an exploration of the proofs of tasawwuf and peeri-mureedi, it is crucial for us to gain an understanding of exactly where they fit into the Islamic system.

### THE LEGACY OF THE SUNNAH

The reality is that the terms shari'ah and tasawwuf,<sup>7</sup> when discussed by great Sufis and orthodox ulama alike, refer respectively to the development of the external actions and internal attributes that are demanded of Muslims. This bifurcation goes back to the distinction between Islam (defined as the exterior actions that

7 To illustrate some of the depth of these issues, one might note that there exist over two thousand definitions of the word 'tasawwuf' alone. Of these, Sidi Ahmad Zarruq declared that the most comprehensive of them is, 'utter truthfulness in one's turning and dedication to Allah (*sidq al-tawajjuh ila Allah*).'



comprise obedience) and Ihsan (the interior state of worshipfulness) mentioned in the hadith of Gibril, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. It is, in turn, reflected most clearly in the personality and life-style of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

When one explores the early development of the shari'ah, as formulated by the great Imams of fiqh, one finds that side-by-side was evolving a parallel systemization of *tazkiyyah* (purification of the soul). From the intuitive understanding of the Sunnah held by the great Sahaba (ra), refined systems of *ibadah* (worship) and *mu'amalah* (social ethics) were elaborated on the basis of logically cohesive and systematic methodology (the madhabs). Likewise, from the inward piety, God-consciousness and saintliness of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the blessed Companions were derived comprehensive methods of purification and sanctity (the tariqas). The foundational figures of shari'ah, such as Imams Abu Hanifah and Shafi'i, lived and toiled alongside the great masters of early Sufism – Hasan Basri, Sufyan at-Thawri and Rabia al-Basri (ra).

The respect that the two groups – one developing the inner way to Allah, one the outer – had for each other was profound. Far from being opposed, they developed their systems in full cognizance of – and deference to – each other. They were acutely mindful of the essential unity and balance of their teachings. This harmonious existence between mystic and jurist, one should remember, is virtually unprecedented in religious history. Most priests have held expressions of spirituality in a mixture of suspicion and contempt, and most mystical traditions have adopted the attitude of Paul, the founder of Christian theology: "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

The reason for this unprecedented level of mutual respect is simple when one considers that the source for their parallel systems was the same. For just as the shari'ah is derived from the words and actions of Rasulullah ﷺ; likewise tasawwuf is nothing but the

systematization of sanctified character and personality.<sup>8</sup> Both, in their essences, are nothing less than an attempt to imitate, as closely and faithfully as possible, the personality of Rasulullah ﷺ. Shari'ah is thus aimed at perfecting the aspect of our personalities that deals with actions, words and the external world; tasawwuf is the method of striving for Rasulullah's ﷺ inner state of continuous contemplation of Allah. As A'isha Siddiqah said in description of him, "he was continuously remembering Allah in his every state and circumstance."<sup>9</sup> The sole reason for the tremendous success that Muslims have enjoyed through the ages can be traced back to their internal and external adherence to this command:

*{Say (to them, oh My beloved Prophet)! 'If you love Allah, then imitate me. Then Allah will love you and forgive your sins.}'*<sup>10</sup>

#### A COMMON PURPOSE

More important than their form, however, is their common purpose: to facilitate the worship of Allah. This is, after all, the reason for our very existence. It is often observed that Muslims get so caught up in following the shari'ah for its own sake that they forget about the reason for doing so. One should never forget that the shari'ah is not the destination – Allah is the destination, the shari'ah is no more or less than the path to that goal. As He reminds us,

8 The detailed and devout imitation of the Holy Prophet ﷺ is truly astounding to an outsider observing Islam. It is testimony to his exalted and unique position that no other single person in the entire history of humanity has stamped so indelible a mark upon both the lifestyles and characters of billions of people throughout history. It has been said, "The great venture of Islam is nothing more or less than the return to its source: to capture and recreate, through the prism of one's own life, the sacred life-moment of prophethood."

9 Sahih Muslim

10 Aal Imran, (3:31)



*"We did not create men and jinn except that they might worship Me."*<sup>11</sup>

The purpose of shari'ah is no more or less than to allow us to worship Allah by performing actions in conformity with His commands. It is a comprehensive system that encompasses every external aspect of human life – from individual prayer to social interaction, involving even 'worldly' activities such as commerce, family relationships and politics. Any lawful pursuit may be classified as worship. On the other hand, though, no activity may be classified as worship unless it is performed with the pre-requisite of devotion, love and sincerity.

Tasawwuf, therefore, is a similarly detailed system designed to bring about exactly this: an internal awareness of Allah at all times and in every state. In order to fulfill our purpose on this earth – in order for worship to occur – all ibadah requires interior devotion as well as exterior action. One cannot drink water without a glass; but a glass without water serves no purpose. One must have both the glass and the water to attain the benefits of both. Shari'ah and tasawwuf are thus dependant upon each other, like form and spirit. Neither can be viewed in isolation, as a coin cannot have only one side. Abd al-Hakim Murad says,

*"In fact we could say that zahir [the form] without batin [the spirit] leads fatally to nifaq [hypocrisy or riyah]. If we are not enjoying the divine presence during our worship, if we have switched on a kind of autopilot, then we are practicing rusum: outward forms. To any onlooker we are proclaiming by the outward form of the act that we are worshipping God; but in our inward reality we are doing nothing of the kind.*

*"An important part of the healing that the Qur'an offers can be found in its insistence that religion includes, and unites, an outward*

<sup>11</sup> al-Dhariyah, (51:55)

and an inward dimension. Allah says: *'and establish the prayer for my remembrance'*. He tells us that the prayer is not an arbitrary command, a set of physical movements that earn us 'treats' in the hereafter. It has a wise purpose, which is to help us to remember Him. The believer at prayer is not just offering his physical form as a token of submission to the divine presence whose symbol is the Ka'ba. He, or she, is worshipping with the heart. The body of flesh bows towards the Ka'ba of stone; while the invisible spirit bows to the invisible divine. Only when both of these take place is worship truly present."<sup>12</sup>

The point being made here – that one should worship Allah with both heart and body – seems rather obvious. Given this, though, it is astounding how much attention we devote to physical worship, whilst ignoring our inward devotion. When the Sufi masters invite Muslims towards inner contemplation and meditation on the presence of Allah (*muraqaba*), they are viewed with great suspicion. Talk of 'perfecting the soul' seems far too mystical, if not faintly heretical, when it is in fact the very essence and core of all Islamic teachings. Allah advises us of this in no uncertain terms:

*"Indeed, he who purifies (his soul) has attained salvation."*<sup>13</sup>

The example of Imam Ghazali (ra) is instructive in this regard. He requires no introduction – he is one of the greatest figures in the history of Islamic scholarship and all of human thought. More will be mentioned of him later in this book, insha-allah. Nevertheless, as he confesses in his autobiography<sup>14</sup>, he could not find satisfaction in the mere rituals of worship. It was the deep desire to experience the blessed presence of Allah in his worship that prompted him to forsake his high position as the director of the greatest religious institution in the world at that time (the Nizamiyyah) and spend twelve

<sup>12</sup> 'Seeing with both Eyes' – a lecture given in Cardiff, UK.

<sup>13</sup> al-Alaa, (88:14)

<sup>14</sup> Deliverance from Error



years with the Sufis. Having mastered tasawwuf, he then devoted the rest of his life to a truly epoch-making task: restoring to Islam a balance between the outer form and the inner spirit. It was this great service that raised him above his contemporaries and for which he is universally acclaimed as a mujaddid – one who revives Islam. Speaking about the types of religiously mandated knowledge, (after discussing necessary worldly knowledge) he declared,

'... [seek those] which pertain to the outward actions such as prayer and fasting. More important however, is the science which all have neglected: namely, the science of the attributes of the heart; those which are praiseworthy and those which are blameworthy, because people persist in the latter, such as miserliness, hypocrisy, pride and conceit, all of which are destructive, and from which it is obligatory to desist ... false ulama recommend outward deeds just as fake physicians prescribe external ointments [for internal diseases]. The ulama who seek the akhirah, however, recommend nothing but the purification of the nafs and the removal of the elements of evil by destroying their nursery-beds and uprooting them from the heart [ie: tasawwuf].'<sup>15</sup>

This is the secret heart of the shari'ah, the greatest of all the forgotten sunnahs – the perfection of the *batin* (inner self). Upon this does all law and practice revolve. It is the primary purpose of tasawwuf and peeri-mureedi; the first stage upon the suluk that the seeker attains and the farthest that most are able to reach. It is therefore the most important for our purposes. In technical terminology, this journey towards perfection of character is called *tariqah*, a much-abused term that requires clarification.

### TARIQAH – THE INNER PATH

The classical Sufi masters, such as Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Muhyi ad-Din ibn al-'Arabi, Imam Ghazali and others, are

15 Ihya Book 1

rightly among the most famous figures in Islamic history. Their books and treatises, in which they systematized the entire science of tasawwuf, are widely available in modern times. This is, of course, a great blessing for the ummah, but their misuse can also be harmful to one's spiritual progress. In much the same way as one finds with hadith compilations such as Sahih al-Bukhari and the Sunan of Abu Dawud, it is assumed by ignorant Muslims that a mere reading of the texts makes one an expert in their subject-matter.

Thus in these strange, modern times one finds pseudo-scholars, armed with Sahih al-Bukhari but no other systematic knowledge of Islam, passing fatwas on subjects infinitely more complex than they could possibly realize.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, one has 'pseudo-Sufis' who have read all of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir's works on tasawwuf (but in English, mind!)<sup>17</sup> but have never sat at the feet of a murshid and traversed the path, who speak at length about the theoretical aspects of tasawwuf. Although their intentions may be correct, this unwise action serves only to confuse and misinform people.

Of all these oft-quoted misconceptions, the most famous is the distinction between *shari'ah* (Islamic law), *tariqah* (the path of tasawwuf), *ma'rifah* (divine knowledge) and *haqiqah* (ultimate reality). This method of describing the various stages that a believer undergoes is an undoubted reality confirmed by all the great luminaries of Islam. However, in the hands of those who follow their desires (and those who wish to refute tasawwuf), one often hears the conclusion, 'tariqah is a higher level and therefore more important than shari'ah, so one who has tasawwuf does not need shari'ah.' This is not only incorrect, but also extremely dangerous

16 A very simple example of this complexity can be found in the appendices under the section on bid'ah. Although it is not the subject-matter of the present book, readers are encouraged to study it as an object lesson as to why one should refrain from forming legal opinions based only on the source texts of Islam.

17 Or worse, Ibn Arabi, whose works are impossible to understand without the guidance of a shaykh. He himself said, 'my writings are forbidden to the layman, for his deficient understanding might lead him to disbelief.'



and condemned by all Sufis. It gives the impression that tariqah is an entirely different entity from shari'ah. It is expressly not. To separate shari'ah and tasawwuf is like trying to separate the 'head' of a coin from its 'tail'. Furthermore, such people give the impression that tasawwuf is some branch of philosophy – something that one studies. Rather, it is expressly something that one lives.<sup>18</sup>

As noted above, a perusal of the Qur'an reveals that Allah commands the believers in many verses to perform actions (such as 'oh ye who believe, establish salaah and pay zakah'), but also – and more frequently – to adopt certain attributes or qualities. Examples of this are too numerous to name – suffice to say that one will find instances on any given page in the glorious Qur'an. These qualities, such as *sabr* (determination), *taqwa* (consciousness of Allah), *rahma* (mercy and compassion), *adl* (justice), *sidq* (truthfulness in word and deed), *hilm* (clemency and kindness) and *tuma'nina* (inner peace and tranquility), are in essence the very heart of Islam. Perfectly, completely and beautifully manifested in the Holy Prophet ﷺ, it is from these internal attributes that all the actions enjoined in the shari'ah spring.

Thus tariqah refers to nothing other than the attainment of internal attributes such as befit a believer. Although in reality, shari'ah and tariqah are but different aspects of each other, a fine but definite distinction can be drawn between them. In simple terms, one might state that the shari'ah teaches 'correctness', but tariqah teaches 'goodness'. Logically, one cannot exist without the other, for beautiful qualities (tariqah) will naturally express themselves in beautiful action (shari'ah). But actions bereft of the qualities instilled by tariqah cannot be called the Law of God – the very thing that makes them divine is the presence of these attributes in the doer. Indeed, they have not been designed to be independent –

<sup>18</sup> I have never heard my own peer mention tariqah in the context of teaching, much less *ma'rifah* or any of the other technical terms of tasawwuf. The Sufis do not lecture to their *mureeds* – in fact they usually say very little – and they certainly do not engage in metaphysical discussions!

one merely needs to examine the Sunnah of Rasulullah ﷺ to know how perfectly and completely action and attribute dove-tail into one another.

### THE ADOPTION OF PERFECTION

The great difficulty for the believer and seeker of Allah is, of course, that qualities and attributes cannot be learnt from books in the same way as ahadith or legal rulings. In fact, classical manuals of *fiqh* – from the simplest to the very greatest – contain scant mention of these qualities and how to achieve them. This is not an oversight on the part of the *fuqaha*; they merely understood that it was outside their scope of expertise. The essential duty of perfection of character has always been the domain of the Sufi peers.

*"Oh ye who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared..."*<sup>19</sup>

There are many verses, and hadith beyond count, like the above-mentioned one in the Holy Qur'an, that exhort the infusion of beautiful characteristics and attributes into the believer's soul. According to the express commandment of Allah himself, then, it is not sufficient merely to practise upon actions; we needs must develop these character traits in order to fulfill our purpose and lofty destiny as 'the best of mankind'. This concept has been elaborated in great detail in preceding sections.

However, though *taqwa*, *sabr* and others are declared to be *wajib* in the Qur'an, exactly how to attain them remains somewhat of a mystery. The above verse, perhaps more so than any other, hints that there is far more to this instruction than meets the eye. It begs the question, 'how *should* Allah be feared?' One can *do* something, but how does one *be* something?

Common experience teaches us that, psychologically, the human being is built in such a way that he absorbs morals, values

<sup>19</sup> Aal Imran, (3:102)



and ethics from those around him. This is most pronounced in childhood, but continues throughout one's life. One may be instructed in the importance of moral values ('honesty is the best policy', for example), but what is practically imbibed is the actual behavior of the instructors. A child absorbs his parents' actions and behaviors rather than their verbal instructions. 'Do what I say, not what I do,' teaches nothing more than conflicting values and outright hypocrisy. It is because of this need to instill beautiful character traits into one's soul that Allah instructs us,

*"Oh ye who believe, fear Allah, and keep the company of the true."*<sup>20</sup>

It is at this point that that Sufi peers come into their own, and their place in the system of teaching Islam becomes apparent. To initiate and facilitate this 'moral osmosis', then, has been the basic responsibility of the Sufi masters from the time of Rasulullah ﷺ. Hasan al-Basri, the greatest of the tabi'in, declared, "if you are of coarse character, then acquire gentleness (*fa tahallam*) ... and a person seldom imitates a certain group without becoming one of them."<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, it is also a commonly experienced psychological phenomenon that encouragement or criticism from one to whom one feels emotionally close, and whose opinion one greatly respects, is taken more seriously and followed whole-heartedly. A mother's criticism or pleasure means a great deal more to her child than a stranger's. So too the admonition of the peer – who is the deputy of Rasulullah ﷺ – is far more effective in correcting the flaws of the mureed, whose love and respect for him is intense.

The example of the sahaba demonstrates this clearly. It was their deep love for Rasulullah ﷺ that prompted them to respond so earnestly to his wishes, and indeed it was their connection to

<sup>20</sup> at-Tauba, (9:119)

<sup>21</sup> Kashf al-Khafa, of al-Aljuni

him that transformed them from ordinary tribesmen into paragons of sanctity and virtue. One of the necessary qualities of the Sufi shaykh, as will be discussed later on, is that one feels exactly this type of attraction for him – this *nisbah* (spiritual closeness) is in fact the very essence of the peer-mureed relationship.

Thus through the force of their personalities, the simple beauty of their lives and the perfection of their characters, the Sufi peers gently and slowly infuse into their mureeds the blessed internal attributes and qualities of Rasulullah ﷺ. The Holy Prophet ﷺ himself has said, "the best of you is the one whose character is most perfect, and I am the most perfect of all of you."<sup>22</sup> In turn the Sufis have declared, "adorn yourself with the qualities of Allah."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Sahih Muslim

<sup>23</sup> 'akhallaqu bi akhlaaqillah!' Though many among both hadith scholars and Sufis aver that it is a hadith of Rasulullah ﷺ himself.



## THE NEED FOR A SHAYKH

*The shaykh is the deputy of Allah's Messenger ﷺ (khalifat Rasulillah). By virtue of the clarity of his soul and his spiritual insight, he is empowered to assist and guide the believer through crucial tasks that cannot be accomplished alone. These are: to develop ihsan; to purge the soul of selfish intentions; and to purify the heart from the worship of all other than Allah.*

Islamic jurisprudence is generally based on four main pillars: evidence from the Qur'an, from the Sunnah, the consensus opinions of learned jurists ('Ijma), and analytical reasoning (Qiyas). In this Information Age, though, it is demanded that all things be acceptable to reason first before all. Our motto seems to be, 'see all, hear all, accept nothing.' We shall, therefore, begin with an exploration of the simple reasons why a shaykh is necessary. In any sphere of learning, logic dictates that the ignorant obtain knowledge from one who is both an expert and also capable of teaching his art. For example, not only could one not learn the art of western medicine merely by reading medical textbooks, the average doctor would also be unable to teach it. For a student wishing to become a physician, the only approach available would be to enroll in a medical school. It is precisely the same reasoning that applies to the Muslim wishing to learn the science of spiritual health and to achieve purification from its diseases.

It is considered especially crucial in the field of the Islamic Sciences (ulum ad-din), to learn from a living master. The very first subject one studies in the traditional Islamic syllabus is this need for a teacher (shaykh). If one wishes to study hadith, one would go to a muhaddith; fiqh would be learnt from a mufti, and so forth.

It is deemed so essential that one who attempts to study without a guiding instructor is deemed to have attained no knowledge at all.

The instruction of a teacher is the one great sunnah of Rasulullah ﷺ that undergirds and provides a foundation for all other sunnahs. As we will show in the succeeding chapters, the master-pupil (peeri-mureedi) relationship pervaded their every interaction, is the basis of every hadith narration, and was the primary source of guidance for the sahaba in every facet of their lives, whether material or spiritual. Commenting on this in his commentary of Bukhari, al-Azdi remarks,

"There is in this hadith evidence that the sunnah for entering the path and undertaking self-discipline [ie: tasawwuf] is to act under the expert guidance, so that he may be shown the way that is ... soundest for that particular wayfarer. That companion ... did not content himself with his own opinion, but sought advice from one more knowledgeable. If this is the case for the lesser jihad [warfare], what about the greater jihad [against the self]?" "

The minimum knowledge obligatory ('ilm al-hal) upon a believer is that which would enable him to satisfactorily follow the way of Islam and survive in the world. This includes belief in the articles of faith, knowledge of the tenets (duties and prohibitions) of the shari'ah, and the conviction that God watches over man's actions.

As one might imagine, the term 'knowledge' in the religious sense is not confined to a mere mental exercise; it also concerns the state of one's heart. The majority of Muslims can distinguish right from wrong, but nevertheless persist in wrongdoing. The deficit lies not in the intellectual recognition of sin, but in attaining the steadfastness (istiqama) to refrain from it. The Sufi shaykh takes the duty of 'al-amr bi'l-ma'ruf wa'nahy 'anil munkar' (enjoining

24 Bahjat an-Nufus, from the commentary of the hadith of the mujahid with elderly parents. Cited in the Encyclopedia of Islamic Doctrine, vol 5.



goodness and forbidding evil) to extraordinary degrees among his disciples. He accomplishes this not merely by censuring actions, but – through his loving patience and the mureed's tremendous respect for him – by rooting out the very causes of unfaithfulness from their souls. The methods used, both deeply psychological and spiritual, are described in this chapter. As Allah says,

*"And admonish them, and say to them that which will pierce their very souls."*<sup>25</sup>

### THE TEACHING OF IHSAN

The basic duty of the shaykh is to teach or inculcate ihsan – that is, to develop the conviction that Allah is watching over one's exterior and interior states. This consciousness of God is given various titles in the Qur'an, but the most commonly used term is TAQWA. The primary and fundamental responsibility of a shaykh towards his disciples is thus to teach them taqwa – that is, to be conscious of God.

At this point, it would be appropriate to clarify the meaning of ihsan (another term for tasawwuf or sufism), as well as to stress its pivotal importance in Islam. In the sacred scriptures, there is a narration known as the hadith of Gibril. Such is its pre-eminence, however, that it is also known as "umm al-Sunnah" or, "THE FOUNDATION OF THE SUNNAH."<sup>26</sup> In it, the Prophet ﷺ – in the form of answers given to the angel Gibril – explains the basic and most essential principles of deen. They are three-fold: IMAN (faith), ISLAM (submission), and the third – IHSAN (spiritual beauty). After describing the nature of Iman and the components of Islam, he

<sup>25</sup> an-Nisa, (4:63)

<sup>26</sup> To illustrate its importance, one might note that S. Murata, a distinguished Professor of Islamic Studies, has written a commentary of this one hadith which runs into 400 pages. It is entitled, 'the Vision of Islam.'

continues as follows:

"...[The stranger] then asked, 'tell me about ihsan.' Rasulullah ﷺ replied, 'it is worshipping Allah as though you see Him; and if you cannot see Him, then [to have complete certainty that] He is seeing you.' ... Rasulullah ﷺ [later] asked me, 'Oh Umar, do you know who the questioner was?' I replied, 'Allah and His Prophet know best.' He told us, 'that was Gibril. HE CAME TO TEACH YOU YOUR RELIGION.'" <sup>27</sup>

Thus ilm al-ihsan (the technical term for tasawwuf) is not an option; not something advanced that can be tackled at a higher stage of spiritual development; and certainly not, as many think, something that only saints need concern themselves with. It is, in the opinion of no less than the master and teacher of all mankind ﷺ himself, one of the fundamentals of religion. It is, in its way, as obligatory as belief, prayer, or fasting. It is clearly not required of every Muslim to reach perfection in ihsan and taqwa, just as it is not necessary for them to become hadith masters or mufasssireen. Very few people are blessed to attain the rank of a Sufi, one who worships Allah through direct witnessing of Him. However, just as a minimum amount of knowledge and action is required in every field of Islam, so too is it imperative to take at least a few steps towards God-consciousness.

The problem arises in that iman (inner faith as opposed to correct doctrinal belief) and taqwa cannot be learnt from books in the same way as hadith, fiqh and tafsir. They must be acquired – developed within the heart. Rasulullah ﷺ spent thirteen years perfecting the ihsan of his companions y before moving on to the duties and rituals of Islam itself. True faith and conviction are grown in the earth of a believer's heart like fragile blossoms – they require a loving and diligent gardener to nurture them in their weakness, water them in their hunger and prune them when they

<sup>27</sup> al-Bukhari, Muslim and others.



grow awry. This most difficult and intricate task is best performed by someone who is both highly qualified in the art, and possessed of the tremendous love and patience required. As has been said before, this is the specialty of the shaykh.

### THE ATTAINMENT OF SINCERITY

*"Verily, actions are judged by intentions, and for every soul is only what they intended."*<sup>28</sup>

If there is one foundational principle of Islam, it is this. Any action done for any motive other than His pleasure is tainted, and 'Allah is pure, and accepts only what is pure.'<sup>29</sup> This is so crucial to the life of every individual Muslim that one might rightly state that, 'success or failure hinge upon sincerity of intention'. Every luminary of Islam, from Sayyidina 'Umar to contemporary scholars, have recognized that this hadith is the central axis of Islam. Imam Bukhari deemed it so important that he placed it at the very head of his al-Jami as-Sahih (the most important of the six canonical collections of hadith). Imam Abu Dawud named it as the foremost of four principles that would suffice a Muslim in both the worlds.

It implies that a lifetime of daily fasting, nights filled with prayer, constant self-imposed hardships and even a martyr's death would all count for nothing if one's intention were not purely to earn God's good pleasure.<sup>30</sup> The opposite of sincerity (*ikhlas*) is hypocritical ostentation (*riya*), and any action that is not completely sincere must have within it some element of *riya*. It is a grave misconception to think that *riya* refers only to showing off in front of others; on the contrary, one can be afflicted by it even when alone. This is to make

28 al-Bukhari

29 al-Bukhari

30 The Arabic hadith commentaries often refer to an action done solely for Allah's pleasure with the beautiful phrase 'li-yabtaghu wajhallah,' which literally means, 'seeking (the vision of) the Countenance of Allah.'

a display of piety to the self; to say, 'see, I am worshipping Allah; I am a religious and righteous person.' This deadly form of *riya* is in reality nothing other than pride, the worst of all spiritual diseases.

It is, in truth, the greatest calamity in the life of any Muslim; one that must be avoided at all costs. It is unfortunate in the extreme, therefore, that religious Muslims expend vast amounts of time and effort making *ibaadah*, all the while paying scant attention to eradicating from it all traces of ostentation. We care about amassing quantity, but not quality, and this in itself betrays the selfishness of our motives. For the desire for quality and purity is the hallmark of love and sincerity; but the desire for quantity is the hallmark of greed and selfishness. Quality delights the receiver (Allah), but quantity satisfies only our own selves; and the true purpose of *ibaadah* is Allah's pleasure, not the rewards that might be bestowed upon us. A simple analogy to illustrate this is as follows:

Actions done with the wrong intention are like bales of cotton. They take tremendous amounts of energy to gather, occupy a lot of space, and look very impressive from afar. However, their weight is insubstantial, their worth is negligible, and one spark of fire (pride) will destroy them all. An action done with a pure intention, however, is like a jewel. It small in size, beautiful in appearance, easy to transport, virtually indestructible and, of course, priceless. In addition, *zakah* is not payable upon it (because it is already purified)!

The essence of *tasawwuf* is thus clear; it is to look within, to probe deeply into the psyche, and root out any factor that detracts from absolute sincerity of intention. For this reason, some contemporary scholars have called Sufism 'Islamic Depth Psychology'. However, total self-honesty is extremely difficult to achieve, and thus it is virtually impossible to ascertain whether or not one's intentions are correct. Imam Nawawi, the mujtahid Shafi'i scholar, reported from none other than Imam ash-Shafi'i himself the saying, 'only one who



is sincere (al-mukhlis) can recognize self-display (riya).<sup>31</sup> He (an-Nawawi) then comments,

"This means that it is impossible to know the reality of self-display and see its hidden shades except for one who resolutely seeks sincerity ... this does not happen for everyone. INDEED, THIS HAPPENS ONLY WITH ELECT (AL-KHAWAS). But for a given individual to claim that he knows what self-display is, this is real ignorance on his part."<sup>32</sup>

It is apparent, from the statements of no less than the Imams Shafi'i and Nawawi, that one who seeks Allah without the guidance of a shaykh is in an untenable position. For him to be able to attain the state of sincerity, he must be able to recognize ostentation; but for him to recognize ostentation, he must have attained a state of sincerity!

Thus despite the centrality of ikhlaas to Islam, it is among the most difficult things to achieve. The great tabi'i Sufyan al-Thawri is reported to have said, "nothing is more difficult for me to treat [correct] than my intention (niyyah), for indeed it turns on me!"<sup>33</sup> Abu Ali ad-Daqqaq also demonstrates the tremendous difficulty of attaining sincerity – even in the higher stages of purification – in his statement, "the short-coming of every person seeking sincerity is the tendency to admire his sincerity."<sup>34</sup>

Just as one cannot see one's own eye unless one looks at a reflection, so too is it impossible to perceive the reality of one's soul without a mirror. The form that this 'soul-mirror' takes is specified in hadith, for Rasulullah ﷺ has said, "each of you is a mirror to his brother."<sup>35</sup> Another version of this hadith, narrated by al-Ghauth al-Azam, states 'the believer is the mirror of the believer.' What this

31 Also attributed to Sahl at-Tustari by al-Jilani in al-Ghunya.

32 Bustan al-'Arifin

33 Ibn Rajab's commentary of an-Nawawi's forty ahadith, hadith no. 1

34 Ghunya Vol 3. He quotes the views of nearly fifty scholars on riya.

35 at-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud.

means is that, with the help and guidance of a true believer, one can see clearly the flaws and faults of one's own soul. The urgent need for a peer is thus clear. It is impossible to break out of this vicious cycle unless one is guided by a purified and sincere master who can perceive the reality of riya.

Historically, in the Muslim ummah, the first to attain this state were the sahaba, because they were guided by the most sincere and sanctified of all creation ﷺ.<sup>36</sup> Thus purified, they in turn – through their companionship, character and instruction – guided their students among the tabi'in to a state of sincerity, and so it has continued down through the ages. The preservation of this sacred cycle is the reality of tasawwuf and the khilafah (spiritual vicegerency). The blessed duty of the saints of Islam is no less than to maintain one of the functions of prophethood itself – the purification of mankind.

It is therefore essential for one to remain in the company of such a person. It is the only way that one can hope to avoid the deadly spiritual disease of riya and to attain a state of ikhlas. Any mureed knows from experience that the description of Imam Nawawi fits the personality of the shaykh exactly. For he is one who has resolutely sought sincerity, devoting his entire life to its pursuit and perfection under the guidance of a shaykh. His khilafah and his perfection are but signs of Allah's blessing upon him; that he is indeed one of the khawas, the spiritual elite of the ummah. Furthermore, he spends the majority of his time guiding the mureed not merely to increase the quantity of his worship, but more so teaching him to purify it of riya. Despite all this, however, the peer will never declare that he has extraordinary abilities of any kind. In his humility<sup>37</sup>, he will echo the self-deprecating words of his beloved Prophet ﷺ and exemplar,

36 As the Qur'an itself testifies: 'God did confer a tremendous favor upon (all of) the believers, when he sent a prophet among them ... sanctifying and purifying them...' (3:164) – This applies to all believers throughout the ages.

37 Sayyidina Ali has declared, 'humility is the crown of true greatness.'



saying, "I am but a man like you..."<sup>38</sup>

Yet this perception – this illuminated vision that discerns the state of the heart – is extraordinary indeed. It is a karamah (miraculous ability) bestowed upon a true believer by Allah, allowing him to look with the spiritual eye into the soul, to judge one's intentions and thus guide the seeker away from riyā and towards ikhlāas. Rasūlullah ﷺ himself has confirmed their status, for he has declared, "beware the gaze of the believer, for he sees with the light of Allah."<sup>39</sup> Indeed, most peers pass beyond this stage and eventually become the beloveds of God (auliyā-allah), and in this exalted state, Allah says, "I become the sight by which he sees... and the hands by which they clasp."<sup>40</sup>

The saints of Islam, deputed by Allah and His Messenger ﷺ to bring true guidance to mankind, have been sent well equipped. They are able to do what most are not: look within, beneath their self-deception, to the core of their hearts. Possessed of this true vision, they can guide those who cannot see reality to correct their intentions and attain the rank of the sincere (*al-mukhlisin*). In this state, insha-allah, we hope that our deeds may be acceptable to Allah.

#### THE PURIFICATION OF THE SOUL

*"By the soul (nafs) ... Truly he who purifies it has attained salvation, and he who corrupts it has lost (everything)."*<sup>41</sup>

The purification of the soul from base desires and evil thoughts is a duty that is compulsory upon every single Muslim. To follow one's desire and satisfy the appetites is a dangerous form of idolatry called 'hidden polytheism' – that is, to make selfish desires more

38 al-Kahf, (18:110)

39 at-Tirmidhi, and cited in Mishkaat.

40 al-Bukhari.

41 ash-Shams, (91:7-10)

important than the wishes of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. The Qur'an warns us against the *nafs al-ammara bi'su* (lowly desires that incite towards evil).<sup>42</sup> It is vital for us to resist this temptation within our own hearts, for Allah has declared,

*"Have you seen the one who makes his base desires his god? Allah has led him astray by his knowledge, and sealed his hearing and his heart, and placed a veil over his eyes."*<sup>43</sup>

One might wonder whether this is an individual task, and not something with which one would need guidance. It is of course an individual duty for all believers to restrain their desires, but this does not mean that one should refrain from guidance and help. It is an individual duty to perform the prayer, but we seek the guidance of the ulama to execute it correctly.

Furthermore, it is clear that several of the points raised in the previous section apply equally here, for purification of the soul and the attainment of sincerity are, to all intents and purposes, much the same thing. One of the duties of Rasūlullah ﷺ is listed as being to purify mankind. As has been pointed out, the purification of the soul is no trifling matter. It is a weighty task indeed; one in which guidance and support are critical. It should now be apparent that the most qualified people to render this assistance are those who have already succeeded – the masters of ihsan and tasawwuf: the Sufi shaykhs.

In his Mathnavi, the epic mystical poem of forty thousand verses, Maulana Rumi tells the story of two groups of artisans – one Greek and the other Chinese. They were placed in a large room, separated from each other by only a curtain, and told to create the most magnificent work of art they could. The Greeks brought the most expensive paints and materials available and crafted beautiful designs on the walls, floor and ceiling. The Chinese instead spent all

42 Sura Yusuf, v 53

43 Sura al-Jaathiya, v 23



their time polishing the walls of the room until they shone. When the curtain was finally removed, the beautiful work of the Greeks was reflected perfectly in the mirror-like surface of the Chinese room. So too the soul of one who perfects this polishing and purification of the soul will reflect, in every word, action, and state, the most beautiful attributes of Almighty Allah and His beloved Prophet ﷺ. This is the supreme achievement. It is towards this that the peer, whose journey is complete and whose heart has been burnished with the polish of remembrance, guides and directs his disciples. Allah says,

*"(Adorn yourself with) the color of Allah! And what is a more beautiful hue than Allah's? And we are indeed his (faithful) worshippers."*<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> al-Baqarah, (2:138)

## THE SUNNAH OF THE PROPHETS

*Peeri-mureedi (the master-disciple Bond) is the Sunnah of Allah, His angels and all the prophets. It is the method He has chosen for the transmission of both spiritual and mundane knowledge for His creation, from the highest to the lowest.*

### THE ORIGINS OF WORSHIP

Before tackling the various scriptural proofs of peeri-mureedi, the reader might be intrigued to know that THOSE ACTS OF THE PROPHETS THAT HAVE TRULY PLEASED ALLAH, HAVE BEEN MADE OBLIGATORY UPON MUSLIMS. For example, the reason that specific rakahs of obligatory prayer are recited at specific times of the day is because previous prophets had performed optional prayer at these very times, in order to thank Allah for various favours and blessings.

For example, after being cast out of paradise, Adam had spent forty years begging for forgiveness before Allah eventually turned to him in mercy, through the intercession of Muhammad ar-Rasulullah ﷺ. So relieved was Adam that he immediately performed two rakahs of prayer out of gratitude at the time of fajr. Musa read four rakahs at 'asr time in order to thank Allah for saving his people and destroying the armies of Pharaoh.<sup>45</sup> The same principle applies to the other daily prayers.

Another example is the hajj; it is common knowledge that the sa'i (the running between the mountains of Safa and Marwa) is performed in commemoration of Hajra's search for water for her baby son Isma'il. Without it, hajj is not complete – in other words,

<sup>45</sup> Referenced in the Hashiya of Imam Tahtawi on the Maraqqi al-Falah of Imam Shurunbulali in Hanafi Fiqh. He gives no further reference.



it is wajib. So pleased had Allah been by all the above-mentioned acts of worship, that he had made both their performance, and the reward accruing from them, compulsory on the community of His Last Prophet ﷺ.

Thus, the emulation of certain acts of the prophets has been made obligatory for Muslims. This rule also holds true for those actions of Allah and His angels that we are capable of following. Allah is merciful and just, therefore we are commanded to instil these divine attributes into our lives. Then, of course, there is that most famous of commands to follow the sunnah of Allah and the massed angels of heaven:

*"Verily, Allah and His angels constantly send prayers upon the Holy Prophet. Oh ye who believe! Send prayers and salutations upon him with the greatest respect."*<sup>46</sup>

One might wonder what the above has to do with the necessity of a shaykh. The answer is that it is THE SUNNAH OF THE PROPHETS u, THEIR FOLLOWERS AND THE ANGELS TO HAVE A SHAYKH. As Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani has stated,

*"He (the seeker) must be assured that Allah has caused it to be the normal state of affairs on this earth, for there to be a shaykh and a seeker, an escort and the one who is escorted, a follower and the one who is followed, from the time of Adam until the advent of the Last Hour."*<sup>47</sup>

## THE PROPHETS AS SHAYKHS AND MUREEDS

This last statement deserves to be explored in more detail. The Qur'an reveals that Adam was taught by Allah the knowledge of all

46 al-Ahzab, (35:56)

47 Ghunya li-Talibi Tariq al-Haqq, Vol 5

things - that is, He treated Adam as a pupil in His company, and Himself performed the role of teacher. When he had perfected this knowledge, Allah set Adam in turn as a shaykh over the angels. It was partly due to this fact that the angels were ordered to show respect to him in the form of prostration. It was also because of his pride-filled disobedience in this matter that Iblis was accursed and cast out of heaven.

*"And he taught Adam the nature of all things... then he said, 'oh Adam! Tell them (the angels) their natures.' And when he had told them ... we said to the angels, 'prostrate before Adam' and they prostrated - all except Iblis. He refused and was haughty, and became of the disbelievers."*<sup>48</sup>

Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani states,

*"He made him a master and a teacher, a shaykh and a wise man... and crowned him with a jewelled headband. He seated him upon a pedestal in the Gardens of Paradise, and stationed the angels around him in rows."*<sup>49</sup>

Adam proceeded to teach his children, and so the cycle continued throughout the ages. Nuh taught his sons, as did Ibrahim.<sup>50</sup> Our own beloved Prophet ﷺ had two teachers - one was the archangel Gibril, who conveyed the Qur'an to him and instructed him in the form of prayer as well as the use of miswak<sup>51</sup>; the other was none other than Allah Himself.<sup>52</sup> Aside from these, virtually every Prophet had

48 al-Baqarah, (2:31-34)

49 Ghunya li-Talibi Tariq al-Haqq, Vol 5

50 al-Baqarah, (2:132)

51 From al-Bukhari: "Gibril advised me on the use of miswaak... and led me in prayer besides the Ka'ba twice..."

52 As the Qur'anic address ('Oh! My beloved prophet...') and the form of any Hadith Qudsi ('The prophet reported that Allah had informed him...') will bear testimony to.



companions whom they taught and instructed; and who eventually emulated their example, followed in their footsteps and conveyed their message to those who came after. Quite apart from the sahaba y, the Qur'an mentions, among others, Yusha bin Nun, the servant and nephew of Musa<sup>53</sup>, as well as the disciples (*hawariyyun*) of Jesus.<sup>54</sup>

It is thus quite clear that it is the way (*sunnah*) of the servants of Allah, whether among men, jinns or angels, that they receive instruction from one other than Allah. It is these teachings that they internalise, practise upon and transmit to others by word and deed. This is even the case for those deputed directly by God to deliver His word to mankind – the prophets.

Even among other religions and scriptures, we find stressed the importance of the master-pupil relationship. Whether it is Krishna and Arjuna, Buddha and his monks, or Confucius and his pupils, we find that the master imparts knowledge and principles of conduct to the disciple by direct contact (*suhba*). In our everyday lives, we learn from our parents, our teachers, and those around us. One does not become a mechanic or a doctor through reading books on the subject – it is essential that an experienced and learned teacher act as guide. It is this to that the great shaykh referred to when he spoke of 'the normal way of the world.'

If this contact was so essential in the preservation and propagation of knowledge in general, or among the ancient religions of the world, how much more so would it be for the teaching of the final revelation from God to man? The Companions of the Holy Prophet ﷺ continued this crucial *sunnah*. Ali's most eminent pupils were his sons, Hasan and Husain, and Hasan of Basra. Abu Bakr as-Siddiq taught his own sons as well as others among the *tabi'in*. Ayesha as-Siddiqah narrated *ahadith* and taught *fiqh* to no less than seventy scholars. It is only through the detailed instruction that the sahaba gave their followers, and they to theirs, *ad infinitum*, that

Islam has been preserved so faithfully through the ages.

"The shaykhs are the road to Allah, the signposts along the way, and the gate by which it is entered. For every seeker (*mureed*) of Allah, the shaykh is therefore indispensable." <sup>55</sup>

## THE TRANSMISSION OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

An objection might be raised at this point. Did not the teachers of the prophets and angels merely instruct them in the way of *shari'ah*, or of mundane knowledge? Is spiritual knowledge or *ilm al-ghaib* (the hidden mysteries), not the preserve of Allah alone? The diverse issues touched upon in this statement deserve to be explored in more depth, but here we will merely look at three examples from the Qur'an and *Sunnah* to demonstrate that spiritual knowledge is very much in the syllabus of the shaykh, even when instructing the prophets themselves.

*"So it was that they found one of our servants, on whom we had bestowed mercy from ourselves and whom we had taught knowledge from our own presence. Moses said to him, 'may I follow thee, that thou might teach me something of the (higher) Truth with which Thou hast been bestowed?'" <sup>56</sup>*

The Qur'an relates a peculiar incident in the life of Musa, famed in Islamic history as the prophet who spoke directly to Allah. He once set out on a journey, at the command of his Lord, to seek out a mysterious saint/prophet who had been taught directly by the Almighty Himself. Upon finding him, he begged to be allowed to accompany al-Khidhr (as tradition names him) in order to benefit from this divine knowledge. Although initially reluctant, the

53 Sura al-Kahf, v 60

54 Aal Imran, (3:52-54)

55 Ghunya li-Talibi Tariq al-Haqq, Vol 5

56 al-Kahf, (18: 65-66)



inscrutable man eventually acceded to the great Prophet's request. However, unable to understand al-Khidhr's strange actions (even though he was a Prophet of Allah), Musa twice questioned them, until the latter parted company with him. It was only then that al-Khidhr explained his deeds with reference to his divinely gifted wisdom. The entire story is told in sura al-Kahf, verses 60-82, and aspects of it will be explored in more detail later in this book, insha-allah.

This relationship is the clearest Qur'anic indication that, in order to receive the higher truth, even perfect knowledge of the law and scripture will not suffice – one needs to seek the company of those to whom this insight has already been granted. It is also clear that the nature of this spiritual knowledge is not of the usual order. Even such a noble and blessed personality as Musa, who spoke directly to God, was not able to comprehend al-Khidhr's wisdom until it was explained to him.

The sahaba, too, were not merely instructed in Islamic practice and law by the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Certain companions received 'secret' knowledge that was not made freely available to others, even among the sahaba themselves. This is why Hudhayfa is referred to as "the keeper of the Prophet's secret (mystical knowledge)."<sup>57</sup> In addition, there is a famously mysterious narration in which Abu Hurayrah said, "the Holy Prophet ﷺ poured into my breast two large vessels of knowledge. One he ordered me to spread amongst the people; but as for the other, if I were to narrate it to you, you would cut my throat!"<sup>58</sup> Other companions, including Abu Bakr, Umar and Sayyidina Ali, have recorded similar sayings.

#### THE MISSION OF RASULULLAH ﷺ

*"God did confer upon the believers a great favour when He sent*

<sup>57</sup> al-Bukhari, in the narration of Abu al-Darda t. Some of the muhadditheen use this title for Abu Darda, Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari and Hudhayfa y.

<sup>58</sup> al-Bukhari.

*to them a Prophet from amongst themselves, rehearsing unto them the signs of God, purifying and sanctifying them, and instructing them in knowledge of the book and in wisdom."*<sup>59</sup>

This verse describes the totality of Rasulullah's ﷺ mission. It had a four-fold aim: to demonstrate to men how to recognise God's signs, to purify them, to instruct them in the law and to teach them wisdom. Put another way, he was sent to teach the sahaba (and by extension, mankind) the outward aspects of Islam, to enliven their hearts with Iman, and to purify their souls until they reached a state of Ihsan. History bears testimony to the fact that he succeeded superbly in all three feats. If any one of them had been lacking, it would have been impossible for Islam to be both the faithfully preserved religion and the vibrant, living faith that it is today. Iman is the founding stone and anchor of the soul, Islam provides the framework and structure within which it can grow, and Ihsan lends wings that man might fly unto God.

It should now be clear that peeri-mureedi (the master-disciple relationship) is not only the Sunnah of the angels, the prophets and the righteous of every nation, but also a vital connection without which the accumulated wisdom of mankind would be lost. The Sufis have likened knowledge to the light of a candle. Transmission of that light requires the unlit candle to come into direct contact with the lit one. Thus has knowledge – both the most mundane and of the highest spiritual order – been passed on since the dawn of time, and so will it be until time's end.

<sup>59</sup> Sura Aale-Imraan, v 164. Several other verses use identical words to describe the Prophetic mission.



## THE ARGUMENT FROM THE QUR'AN

*The Qur'an exhorts believers not only to stay in the company of the saintly, but to actively follow their example, in order that they may be rightly guided, and saved from the whispering of shaytaan and the nafs. Furthermore, He has declared that mankind requires a wasilah (means of approach) unto Him. It is the firm belief of the Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jamaah that the shaykh is a sure wasilah.*

As the primary source text of Islam is nothing other than the exalted speech of God Almighty, any study of the Islamic justification of peeri-mureedi must begin with the Qur'an. There are several passages that both implicitly and explicitly point to the importance of having a shaykh. For the sake of brevity, only a few will be discussed.

### THE COMPANY OF THE SAINTLY

*"Oh ye who believe! Fear Allah, and keep the company of those who are true (in word and deed)." 60*

This is one of the clearest justifications of peeri-mureedi that occurs in the Holy Qur'an. It is self-explanatory, and little further comment is needed. One should note that it is addressed to the mu'mineen – those who already have faith in God. 'Keep the company' is the imperative form of the Arabic verb; thus it is in fact the command of Allah – or wajib – that the believers endeavour to be with the siddiqin. The crux of this ayah therefore revolves around the definition of 'those who are true.' It clearly does not refer to mere truthfulness in speech, but rather, as translated above,

60 at-Tauba, (9:119)

those in whom there exists no disharmony between internal and external conditions. In his monumental tafsir, after discussing several ahadith and the views of the learned, al-Qurtubi concludes,

*"In truth ... [it means] one who adheres to truthfulness in speech, sincerity in action, purity in all states, and likewise one who is united with the righteous and attains the good pleasure of the All-Forgiving Lord." 61*

In the opinion of the salaf, the attribute of *sidiq* is the highest of all stages of the human soul. It was the title accorded by Rasulullah ﷺ himself to Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, who was the greatest of mankind after him. Harith al-Muhasibi remarks,

*"Truthfulness ... means evenness in visible and hidden behaviour. It is realised after the realisation of all stations ... to seek Allah by worshipping with complete presence of heart before him." 62*

Scholars who came after the systematisation of Islamic knowledge, such as al-Kandhalawi were far more explicit as to the identity of those who deserved this exalted title:

*"the commentators have written that by 'truthful' are meant the mystics (Sufis) and the true lovers of Allah, for whoever attaches himself to them ... attains very high standards of spirituality." 63*

The wisdom behind Allah commanding the believers to remain in the company of the siddiqeen becomes apparent when one considers the following verses, which describe a conversation between Iblis and Allah.

*"Iblis said, '...and I will put them all in the wrong – all except Thy sincere and purified servants among them.' Allah said,*

61 al-Jami li Ahkam al-Qur'an, the tafsir of 9:119.

62 'Encyclopedia of Islamic Doctrine, Vol 5.'

63 Faza'il-e-A'maal



*'This is indeed the Straight Way unto Me. Over My servants no authority shalt thou have, save those who put themselves in the wrong and follow thee...'* <sup>64</sup>

When Allah cursed Iblis and cast him out of heaven, the latter swore that he would lie in wait on the Straight Path (*sirat al-mustaqim*), in order to waylay the believers. As is clear in the above verses, he confidently declared – and Allah confirmed – that he would succeed in misguiding them. The only exceptions to this promise are the sincere and purified servants of Allah, who have been granted divine protection from the wiles of the devil. The only way for them to be misled is through following their nafs.<sup>65</sup> It is for this reason that the learned among the ummah have always counselled that nafs are the greatest enemy of the soul. The believer can be led astray even though he may try with might and main to follow the straight path.

My shaykh once told us, 'never forget that shaytaan is cleverer than you are – he can misguide you even while making you think that you are doing good'. A simple example of this might be as follows: shaytaan can encourage a man to perform tahajjud, be the first one in the masjid for fajr, recite long rakahs, to remain in dhikr until after sunrise, and so on. Each one of these actions is extremely meritorious; but all the while, shaytaan will stir pride to awaken in the heart, corrupting the intention and leading the believer away from sincerity and towards ostentation, until he eventually suffers the same fate as Iblis himself. No matter how hard one tries, it is extremely difficult to tell the difference between the whisper of God (*nafs ar-Rahman*) and the whisper of the devil (*nafs ash-shaytan*) within the heart.

In addition to prayers and supplications, despite (or perhaps because of) his reliance upon God, the Muslim is also required to

<sup>64</sup> al-Hijr, v39-42

<sup>65</sup> It is because of this that one finds the Sufis constantly safeguarding their hearts against their nafs through spiritual discipline and the remembrance of God.

act to avoid the danger. Among the options suggested by the Holy Prophet ﷺ to counter this formidable threat to iman is *muhasaba* (honest and critical self-reflection). In addition, Allah has ordered that one remain in the company of those who are blessed with His protection and moreover, as has been described earlier, are able to facilitate this self-reflection with their spiritual perception.

*"And keep thy soul content (Oh my beloved Prophet!) with those who call upon their Lord by morn and eve, seeking His Face, and let not thine eyes pass beyond them..."* <sup>66</sup>

Keeping the company of the righteous, and specifically the people of dhikr, is such a noble and important duty that even the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been requested to do it. Indeed, tradition narrates that he used to thank Allah for raising, in his community, people of such piety that even he was ordered to be with them.<sup>67</sup> One interpretation of this verse is that Rasulullah ﷺ has been commanded so, in order that those righteous servants of Allah can be favoured with his blessed gaze and by being a source of his contentment. What greater benefit or honour could there possibly be for any true believer than to be in the company of those who bring joy to the heart of the most beloved of Allah ﷻ?

#### THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAINTLY

*"Guide us (Oh Lord), onto the Straight Path (sirat al-mustaqeem); the Path of those upon whom thou hast showered thy blessings..."* <sup>68</sup>

It is rather ironic that another of the clear proofs of peeri-mureedi occurs directly after what is taken to be the greatest proof

<sup>66</sup> al-Kahf, (18:28)

<sup>67</sup> at-Tabarani, also see Faza'il-e-A`maal

<sup>68</sup> al-Fatihah, (1:5-6)



against it! Opponents of peeri-mureedi often quote the fifth verse of Sura al-Fatiha ('lead us onto the straight path') in support of their claim that Allah alone is the One to whom we should turn for guidance. The fact that Allah alone guides and gives faith is not a point of disputation; any more than the fact that He (and not our mothers) causes us to be born, or that He (and not disease or accident) causes us to die, or that He (and not our own hard work) provides us with sustenance. All these things are done by Allah. He is the Mover behind the workings of the universe, the Cause of all causes and the Provider of all means. However, it is His Sunnah that He accomplishes the vast majority of occurrences through some intermediary process (*wasilah*).

According to the science of logic, this *wasilah* is called the proximate cause (*sabab majazi*) – that is, the apparent or immediate cause. The will of Allah, which is of course the ultimate reason for all movement and change in the universe, is termed the remote cause (*sabab haqiqi*). To use a simple analogy, if a ball breaks a window, the ball is the proximate cause, but the remote (or real) cause is the one who threw it. This is Allah's way in the heavens and the earth, which is why exceptions to His general rule are called 'miracles.'

In much the same way, Allah's true guidance has not been innately revealed into our hearts; it came in the form of mortals. These are people that He raised from amongst us, purified and sanctified, and sent to be the teachers, guides and preceptors of mankind. These are those upon whom He has bestowed his blessings; in whose footsteps we pray to be guided. Forty times a day in prayer, through all our standing, bowing and prostration, we make but one, single, request to Allah: that He guides us in the way of these people.

Careful inspection of the verse's wording reveals that we do not specify that Allah guides us along the path of the Qur'an, or the way of the hadith, but by the *example of those sanctified human beings who have already made the journey to Allah*. Naturally, the question arises as to the identity of these blessed people. One would obviously assume that it refers to the Prophets. However, Allah has

answered even this seemingly transparent question:

"All who obey God and His Messenger are in the company of those upon whom God has showered his blessings (*an'am allahu alayhim*) – of the prophets, the champions of truth, the faithful witnesses and the righteous. Ah! What a beautiful fellowship are they!"<sup>69</sup>

Again, one must look with the eye of understanding, at this verse. One of the miracles of the Holy Qur'an is its concise nature. Every single word is carefully chosen, filled with meaning and consequence; and there is nothing superfluous in it. All of these four categories of people are referred to in sura al-Fatiha; those to whom we are ordered to look for guidance. Allah, in His infinite wisdom, did not merely declare the Prophets to be exemplars to mankind. He also included in their ranks the truthful (*siddiqin*), the witnesses (*shuhada*) and the righteous (*salihin*).

This is an excellent demonstration of Allah's mercy to His creation. Prophets come and go; many generations of mankind do not have the good fortune to be blessed with their physical presence, or to witness their conduct first-hand. For those (such as we ourselves) Allah has provided men and women of every generation who stand out, like radiant beacons through the night, as shining examples to their fellows, living proof of the truth and purity of their messengers' teachings.

Allah says concerning the Qur'an, "by it Allah guides many, and by it he leads many astray."<sup>70</sup> In addition, when Ayesha t was asked to describe Rasulullah's ﷺ personality, she replied, "his character was the Qur'an."<sup>71</sup> These quotations imply that Holy Scripture –

<sup>69</sup> an-Nisa, (4:69). An'ama and an'amta, from Sura al-Fatiha v6, are of course, exactly the same verb. The connection between these two ayahs is reported in al-Qurtubi's tafsir as being the consensus of the ulama.

<sup>70</sup> al-Baqarah, (2:26)

<sup>71</sup> Muslim



though perfect – can sometimes be misinterpreted, or twisted to suit one's own whims or fancies, and thus actually lead a person astray. However, the friends of God – protected from the wiles of shaytaan and constantly guarding against their nafs – embody the Qur'an and Sunnah perfectly, and serve as personifications of Allah's teachings. It is far easier to model one's actions on a human being, than on a collection of writings and teachings. The Qur'an and Sunnah are the yardstick by which a man's piety is judged, but conversely the saints are the exposition and living explanation of the holy scriptures. It is through them that one may learn how to apply and correctly follow Islamic injunctions and principles.

### A MEANS OF APPROACH

*"Oh ye who believe! Fear Allah, and seek a means of approach unto Him, and strive hard in His way that ye may achieve felicity."*<sup>72</sup>

In this verse, Allah orders the believers to do three things in order that they might be successful. Fear of Allah (taqwa) has already been discussed at length. It should be remembered, however, that taqwa encompasses every aspect of worship; in reality, it alone should suffice a believer. However, Allah has stipulated further pre-conditions for a believer's success. Striving hard (*jihad*) involves making efforts to attain His nearness. This point will be more fully explained later, in the hadith of *Qurb an-Nawafil*. Suffice to say, however, that it includes compulsory duties such as prayer and fasting, as well as the whole spectrum of optional acts of worship. It is from this root word (J-H-D) that the word *mujahada* (spiritual striving or discipline) is derived.

However, the third separate activity we are commanded to undertake is to find a wasilah or means of approach unto Allah. All mufasssireen, including the modern commentators who oppose

<sup>72</sup> al-Ma'idah, (5:35)

orthodox concepts of peeri-mureedi and *tawassul*, agree that there are three permissible means of approach to Allah: firstly, through righteous deeds, secondly, through dua, and finally, through the mediation of righteous and saintly people.<sup>73</sup> The reason that one leans towards the last option is a simple matter of effectiveness. The efficacy of good deeds (*'amal salih*) as a wasilah depends entirely on the purity of one's intention.

As explained in previous chapters, purity of intention is an extremely difficult feat to attain – it is in fact one of the prime reasons that one requires a shaykh! The hadith of the three men trapped in the cave<sup>74</sup> gives one an idea of the tremendous sincerity required in actions for them to be effective as wasilah. Dua is a powerful tool, but it too depends on sincerity. A hadith declares, *"there is an obstacle between every dua and Allah except two: an oppressed man and a brother for his brother (in his absence)."*<sup>75</sup>

The great ulama, in their humility, considered neither their deeds nor their dua as worthy of attaining Allah's nearness. It was therefore the habit of both the salaf and the khalaf to seek the wasilah of the friends of Allah. Thus one finds al-Shafi'i visiting the tomb of Abu Hanifah and asking Allah to fulfil his need through his wasilah. He also used to petition his great female teacher, the saintly Nafisa at-Tahirah to make dua for him in his sickness and for barakah. Ibn Hanbal used to seek the wasilah of Imam Shafi'i by drinking the washing water of his shirt.<sup>76</sup> Many more such examples could be given, but this book is not primarily concerned with the Islamic practice of *tawassul*. We will, therefore, content ourselves with examining the commentary of this ayah according to some of the scholars of tafsir. Sakhawi says, *"Wasilah literally means that*

<sup>73</sup> These are not arbitrary categories; all three are proven by Qur'anic ayahs and sound ahadith. They are, however, beyond the scope of this work.

<sup>74</sup> Al-Bukhari, Muslim

<sup>75</sup> At-Tabarani

<sup>76</sup> Khayrat al-Hisan



through which a person is able to gain nearness [qurbah] to a great personality like a king..."<sup>77</sup>

The view of Sakhawi is in fact merely a narration of the view of the great sahaba mufassir, Ibn Abbas, as reported by his pupils Mujahid, 'Ata and others<sup>78</sup>. Zamakhshari, the famous commentator and grammarian, has explained this statement further,

"Wasilah means everything through which one may gain nearness to Allah, whether that be ANY FORM OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIP or any righteous deed..."<sup>79</sup>

Allamah al-Jazari is even more explicit. He says,

"It is advisable to seek a path of nearness (tawassul) to Allah through His ambiya u, as reported in Bukhari ... and also THROUGH THE RIGHTEOUS SAINTLY ONES..."<sup>80</sup>

As these great scholars have indicated, the wasilah that Allah is commanding us to seek refers to a spiritual link with the saintly ones, through whom we can forge a link with Allah and His Messenger.

In conclusion, it should also be noted that this verse describes tasawwuf in a nutshell. The way of tariqah is naught but the straight path to God. It is a path of total commitment and devotion, sacrifice of all that is other-than-Allah, and complete self-annihilation. Only a true believer may even approach it. To journey away from the self and towards Allah, one requires the three basic pre-requisites enumerated in the above verse. Firstly, the heart must contain a deep and unwavering yearning for Allah's presence (taqwa). Secondly, one must be prepared not only to adhere to the shari'ah, but to strive for its highest aims (jihad). Finally, but also first before all, ONE NEEDS MUST SEEK A SPIRITUAL GUIDE, for his companionship, guidance

77 Virtues of Salaat alan Nabi

78 Reported in Al-Jami li-Ahkam al-Qur'an and Tafsir Ibn Kathir

79 From Tafsir al-Kashaf of Zamakhshari, reported in tafsir al-Baydawi

80 Hisn al-Hasin

and dua are a sure means of approach (wasilah) unto Allah. He has ordained in the Holy Qur'an,

"Follow the path of those who turn to Me (in love)..."<sup>81</sup>

81 Luqman, (30:15)



## THE ARGUMENT FROM SUNNAH

*The entire Sunnah rests upon the peer-mureed relationship between Rasulullah ﷺ and his sahaba. The totality of peeri-mureedi is Sunnah, as well as every component part. Many ahadith extol the exalted status of the auliya-allah and the importance of being in their company. One should seek to remain with them and develop love for them, because in the hereafter a person will be with those whom he loves.*

One of the least-recognised failings in contemporary Muslims - especially the more earnest - is their inability to distinguish between Sunnah and hadith. HADITH refers to narrations ascribed to the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Each consists of a *matn* (body of text) and an *sanad* (chain of narrators) and is classified according to its reliability and the number of chains through which has been transmitted. The SUNNAH, on the other hand, in its most general sense is the complete way of life of Rasulullah ﷺ - that is, his words, actions, silent approvals, states and description.<sup>82</sup> The relation of hadith to Sunnah is like that between single pieces of a jigsaw and the entire picture. The former are the way to the latter.

A particular hadith may be cancelled, limited in scope, or further explained by various others. A hadith may contain several sunnahs, and a single sunnah can be inferred from many ahadith. Although it is certainly meritorious to act upon a hadith, one must always bear in mind that this is not the same as adopting the Sunnah as one's life pattern, in the same way that one cannot judge a jigsaw puzzle by looking at a single piece.

<sup>82</sup> This is the definition of the muhaddithin. The fuqaha only include the first three categories.

This is why the great scholars of Islam, after systematically studying the entire body of hadith material, have distilled the sciences of FIQH (the external Sunnah) and TASAWWUF (the internal Sunnah). It is an unfortunate fact that Muslims today tend to (unconsciously) select hadith that suit their own natures and follow them blindly, without an understanding of how these individual prescriptions fit in to the greater framework of the Sunnah. We tend to follow specifics rather than general principles; adopt the form but not the spirit of Islam. One should always bear in mind that Muslims have been commanded to follow the Sunnah - that is, to adopt the lifestyle, character and manners of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

This fact is important because, although there are specific ahadith which indicate the importance of having a shaykh, one over-riding fact should always be borne in mind: THE ENTIRE SUNNAH RESTS UPON THE PEERI-MUREEDI RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RASULULLAH ﷺ AND HIS COMPANIONS.

When a mureed studies hadith, he cannot help but be struck by the uncanny similarities between the two relationships. This is far from co-incidental; the master-disciple bond is closely modelled upon the bond between Rasulullah ﷺ and his sahaba - ie: IT IS SUNNAH. Examples are too numerous to mention, but they usually do not form the explicit subject-matter of any hadith. These include: the sahabas' pledge of allegiance (*bay'ah*), the twenty-three years of teaching and purification (*islah an-nafs*), their long association with him (*suhba*), the unbounded love and respect that the sahaba had for Rasulullah ﷺ (*nisbah*), his appointment of some of them as teachers to other tribes, and their eventual continuation of his divine mission after his death (*khilafah*).

### AULIYA-ALLAH - THE BELOVEDS OF GOD

Keeping in mind the immensely important point mentioned above, we will now look into some of the narrations specifically referring to the need for a shaykh. The exalted status of the friends



of God (auliya-allah) and their lofty role cannot be underestimated. They have been described as those upon whom comes neither fear nor grief; those who on the Day of Judgement will have a position that even the prophets will envy, souls at peace with themselves, and those who love and are beloved of God. It is this final point that is the crux of the argument. Their true spiritual state can only be guessed at – it is ultimately a mystery between the lover and the Beloved. However, there are hints of their tremendous sanctity are contained in several ahadith.

“When the Prophet ﷺ finished his prayer he turned to face the people and said: “O people! Listen to this, understand it, and know it. Allah has servants who are neither prophets nor martyrs, but whom the prophets and martyrs yearn to be like, due to their seat and proximity in relation to Allah...” One [of the sahaba] asked, “Oh Prophet! Who are they that we might love them?” Rasulullah ﷺ said, “they are strangers from this place and that... they love one another for Allah’s sake... on the Day of Resurrection Allah will seat them on pedestals of light, and He will turn their faces and clothes into light. On the Day of Resurrection all will be terrified except them. THEY ARE THE FRIENDS OF ALLAH (AULIYA-ALLAH) upon whom fear comes not, nor do they grieve.”<sup>83</sup>

Many important points are made in this powerful hadith, which describes the tranquility of the auliya-allah in the face of the terrors of Qiyaamah. It is narrated through several chains in various collections and also in Qur’anic commentaries. Most of these points speak for themselves, but not least of these is that the sahaba themselves have declared their love for the auliya-allah. Ali was also reported to have exclaimed, “Ah! How one yearns to see

83 Mishkaat, Ahmad (sahih), Abu Dawud, and others. Another reading of this hadith states, “they love one another with the light of Allah ... their faces are light on pulpits of light...”

them?”<sup>84</sup> As a precautionary note, one should realize at this point that just because the auliya will be the envy of the prophets does not mean in any way that they have a higher rank. On the contrary, we follow the doctrine (aqida) of the Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l Jamaah who state: “we do not prefer any of the saints to the Prophets; but we say that all the saints together do not equal the rank of one Prophet.”<sup>85</sup>

“He who opposes a friend of God declares a war against God ... THEIR HEARTS ARE LIKE CANDLES OF GUIDANCE, so that no darkness can harm them...”<sup>86</sup>

“The friends of Allah! Upon them comes not fear, nor shall they grieve. Allah is remembered through remembrance of them.”<sup>87</sup>

“The pre-eminence of a knower (alim) over a worshipper is like my pre-eminence over the lowest of you.”<sup>88</sup>

“The honour and respect due to a true believer is greater than that due to the Holy Ka’ba.”<sup>89</sup>

Speaking about Uwais Qarni, the greatest of the tabi’in, Rasulullah ﷺ said to none other than Umar himself,

“If he were to swear, relying upon Allah, for anything, Allah would fulfil his oath. If you can prevail upon him to ask for your forgiveness, you must ...and Umar did so when he met him.”<sup>90</sup>

84 Sifat as-Safwa

85 Aqida at-Tahawiyyah

86 Ibn Majah, also in similar wording in al-Bukhari (see below)

87 at-Tabarani (hasan). It can also read, ‘...through their remembrance.’

88 at-Tirmidhi

89 Mishkaat

90 Muslim



"Allah says, 'Whosoever bears enmity to My friend, I declare war on him. My servant does not approach Me by anything more than the performance of his fardh acts. He continues to draw near to Me by performing nafl acts of worship until I LOVE HIM. And when I love him, I become the Eye by which he sees, the Ear by which he hears, the Tongue by which he speaks, the Heart with which he comprehends, the Hand by which he strikes, and the Feet by which he walks. If he asks of Me, I certainly give to him. If he seeks refuge in Me, I most certainly protect him...' " "

We end this section with the astonishingly powerful narration of Qurb an-Nawafil. Such is the majesty of its language; such is the utter profundity of its words, that it could only have been uttered by the tongue of Allah Himself. It speaks of the hidden reality (haqiqah) of the perfect man and of the true state of God's vicegerent. There are mysteries within it so profound that the human mind simply cannot encompass them. In Fath al-Bari, the greatest of all commentaries of Sahih al-Bukhari, Imam ibn Hajar al-Asqalani examines no less than thirty understandings of it by great hadith masters.

Among those he includes the prevalent view that it is the basis of the Sufi understandings of *fana* (annihilation of one's personality in Allah) and *baqa* (manifestation of divine attributes in humanity).<sup>91</sup> Within those few, pregnant words, the seeker may find the fundamentals, the path, the truth and the ultimate goal of tasawwuf and peeri-mureedi. Such is the splendour of Qurb an-Nawafil that we need not comment on it more than saying that, taken alone, it stands as proof of the whole of tasawwuf.

### THE COMPANY OF THE SAINTLY

Taking into account the tremendous status of the auliya-allah,

<sup>91</sup> al-Bukhari, an-Nawawi's forty ahadith (38) through several chains. This is the narration of Abd al-Wahid.

<sup>92</sup> Fath al-Bari

it is perhaps unsurprising that there are many ahadith – most being self-explanatory – stressing the importance of having a close relationship (nisba) with the pious and the saintly. Included in this group are those numerous ahadith that emphasise the importance of congregational *dhikr* – the primary method of all Sufis. Indeed, the distinguishing characteristic of the Sufi masters is the stress that they lay on the performance of *dhikr* under the shaykh's guidance.

"Shall I tell you a thing which is THE PILLAR OF FAITH and through which you can attain good in this world and the next? It is THE COMPANY OF THE PEOPLE OF DHIKR (those who remember and glorify their Lord)..."<sup>93</sup>

In this hadith, the company of the saints has been described as the pillar of faith – that is, the foundation upon which faith is based. This hadith explicitly confirms the importance of the shaykh, and underscores what has been discussed in previous sections. Those arguments are, in fact, the explanation of this hadith.

"Luqman<sup>94</sup> instructed his son in these words, 'keep the company of the scholars, and listen attentively to the words of the wise, for therewith Allah revives dead hearts ... and THE WISE ALONE UNDERSTAND RELIGION'..."<sup>95</sup>

This too refers back to the point made earlier: it is through observing the shaykh that one gains an understanding of how particular ahadith fit into the framework of the entire Sunnah. The shaykhs are living personifications of the Sunnah.

"...(the best companion is) such a person who, when you see him, you remember Allah; when you listen to him, your knowledge of Islam increases; and when you see his actions, you are reminded

<sup>93</sup> Mishkaat, also cited in Bayhaqi's 'Branches of Faith'.

<sup>94</sup> A saint renowned for his wisdom, after whom a Surah has been named.

<sup>95</sup> Faza'il-e-A'maal



about the life to come.”<sup>96</sup>

“The case of a good companion ... is like that of a perfume-seller. The perfume-seller might give you some as a gift, or you might buy some, or at least you might smell its fragrance.”<sup>97</sup>

“When you pass the gardens of paradise, graze to your heart’s content ... they are the gatherings of dhikr.”<sup>98</sup>

This hadith describes the gatherings of dhikr as gardens of paradise. One might wonder what greater compliment the very lips of Holy Prophet ﷺ could possibly have given. Further, what must be the status of those who regularly convene such blessed gatherings?

“When the verse: ‘content your gaze with those who call upon their lord’ was revealed, Rasulullah ﷺ searched for those people and found them in the furthest corner of the masjid, engaged in dhikr ... he said, ‘my life and my death is with you’ (ie: you will be my companions in this world and the next) ... he further said, ‘I saw the mercy of Allah descending upon you, and I desired to join your company.’”<sup>99</sup>

There can be no greater reward for the believer than to bring joy to the soul of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, which it is clear that those who perform dhikr certainly do. In addition, one receives the incalculable benefit of the descent of Allah’s mercy upon these gatherings. Most importantly of all, however, is that one will be the companion of the Holy Prophet ﷺ in this world and the next.

96 Mishkaat

97 al-Bukhari, Muslim

98 Mishkaat, at-Tirmidhi who also uses the word ‘masaajid’ in place of ‘gatherings of dhikr’. Reconciliation of these two wordings leads one to the conclusion that it is permissible to perform congregational dhikr in masaajid, as many ulama have stated.

99 Faza’il-e-A`maal (this is further confirmation of the above conclusion).

This alone should be incentive enough to remain in the company of the Sufis, who are always engaged in, and engage others in, the remembrance of Allah.

### YOU WILL BE WITH THOSE YOU LOVE...

We have established beyond any doubt the lofty rank of the auliya-allah, and the crucial importance of being in their company. However, quite apart from the material or spiritual rewards one obtains from their presence, there is another far more important reason. After all, one should not become a mureed in order to attain benefit – just as one should not worship for this reason. These things are done – if they are to be acceptable to Allah – only out of love. Love is the single most important motivating and purifying factor for any believer, for it is from love (*muhabba*) of Allah that fear of displeasing Him (*taqwa*) is born. Only that done out of love is pure enough to be accepted by Him.

“Not one of you has (complete) faith until you love Allah and His Rasul ﷺ more than your possessions, your family, and your own self.”<sup>100</sup>

“There are three qualities that will enable a person to taste the sweetness of faith: that he loves Allah and His Messenger ﷺ more than anything else, that he loves others only for the sake of Allah, and that he abhors disbelief as he would abhor being thrown into a fire.”<sup>101</sup>

However, if one honestly self-reflects, one must concede that it is extremely difficult to feel true love for Allah and Rasulullah ﷺ. We cannot conceive of Allah – He is wholly other, utterly beyond comprehension. We know about the Holy Prophet ﷺ through the

100 Muslim

101 Bukhari



hadith and books of Sirah, but we do not know HIM. Respect, admiration and obedience are different from love.

Love (nisba) grows through companionship (suhba), as grew the love of the sahaba for Rasulullah ﷺ. In our case, it begins with love for the shaykh, and as he nurtures and perfects it, it grows into love for Rasulullah ﷺ and Allah. This is because, as we get to know our shaykh, we are in reality learning about Rasulullah ﷺ.

That which we love in the shaykh is actually the personality of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, which he is reflecting as a pool reflects the image of the sun. We cannot look at the sun directly, for our eyes will become blind, but we can admire and grow to love its beauty in a clear pool or mirror. True love is the basis of worship, and without it, ibaadah is not acceptable to Allah. Furthermore, Rasulullah ﷺ has stated – in numerous ahadith – words to this effect:

“You will be with those you love.” It was this statement that occasioned Anas bin Malik to declare, “no words of Rasulullah ﷺ ever made the sahaba as joyous as these.”<sup>102</sup>

The reason it made them happy was not because it was a promise to them of paradise (ie: not for selfish reasons). They had often grieved about the fact that they would be deprived of the blessed company of the Holy Prophet ﷺ in the hereafter (for his rank would be far above theirs). When he explained to them that they would be together even then – and that too, for all time – their joy knew no bounds.

“Allah says, ‘whoever loves another for the sake of My majesty and honour, there will be for him high seats of light that will be the envy of the prophets and martyrs.’ ”<sup>103</sup>

“A villager came to Rasulullah ﷺ and he asked him ‘what prepara-

tions have you made for the Day of Judgement?’ The villager replied, ‘only the love of Allah and His Messenger.’ Rasulullah ﷺ said, ‘you will be with those you love.’ ”<sup>104</sup>

“A man, who had set out to visit his brother in another town, was visited by an angel who asked him why he was doing it. The man replied, ‘I visit him because I love him only for the sake of Allah.’ The angel replied, ‘Allah has sent me to tell you that He loves you just as you love your brother.’ ”<sup>105</sup>

By spending time in the company of one’s shaykh, serving him, observing his personality and conduct, and interacting with him, you will begin to love him. Moreover, through this love for him, you will begin to experience love for Allah and His beloved Rasul ﷺ. This is the highest and noblest of all things. It marks the pinnacle of human achievement, the perfection of faith, the very reason and purpose of existence. And it is achieved through the companionship of the Sufis. It has been said:

*“What incites a man to drink except the company of drunkards?  
If you wish to taste the wine of God’s love, be with those who  
have already drunk deep from the cup.”*

102 al-Bukhari, Muslim

103 at-Tirmidhi (sahih). ie: the station of the auliya-allah.

104 al-Bukhari  
105 Muslim



## THE ARGUMENT FROM SCHOLARLY CONSENSUS

*It has been the considered opinion of the vast majority of the greatest scholars of Islam, from the Salaf up until the present day, that the science of tasawwuf is not only permissible, but one of the three fundamental aspects of the religion and operationally obligatory in its most basic form. This holds true even for those scholars that many have assumed to be its opponents. The same applies to the master-pupil relationship, as exemplified by peeri-mureedi.*

'Ijma, or the consensus of the righteous scholars, forms the third level of justification for an Islamic argument. Formally, it refers to the agreement of every mujtahid Imam (scholars capable of independent legal reasoning) alive in a particular time on a specific issue of fiqh. It is not being claimed here that there is formal ijma' on the acceptability of specific forms of tasawwuf known to people. Rather, what is intended here is the more general linguistic usage of the word, meaning, *'the gathering of an agreement by those qualified to hold an opinion.'* That is to say, what did the great ulama throughout history have to say about tasawwuf?

Before exploring their views on this subject, it is important for us to understand exactly why their opinions hold such a weight. From a purely reasonable point of view, the answer is obvious. If we want to know how to be healthy, we would be best advised to consult an expert in the field – in this case a doctor. If we hear a strange noise in our car engine, we would be ill advised to open an automobile manual and attempt to discover and fix the problem ourselves. If one does not even have the basic knowledge of how a car works, it would be not only foolish, but downright dangerous to tamper with the engine. If, for mundane issues of the world, we seek

the advice of experts, how much more important is it for affairs of the soul?

Islam is a religion of praxis. It is primarily concerned not with obscure philosophy or metaphysics, but with the correct way to live. The two keys of salvation are true faith and right action – both are necessary to attain salvation. Given this, a very great degree of caution needs to be exercised in understanding deen (the Islamic way of life). It is essential that we consult those who have spent their entire lives studying Islam in order that we be rightly guided. Imam Muhammad ash-Shaybani, the foremost pupil of Imam Abu Hanifah, was reported to have said, *"we spend our nights awake (studying and systematizing deen) so that others can sleep comfortably (knowing that their religion is easy)."*

However, one can argue, we have the both the original Qur'an and Sunnah in written form. Why should we need to consult experts when the basic information is so clearly spelt out? Unfortunately, things are not as obvious as they first seem to be. Rasulullah ﷺ has warned, *"He who interprets the Qur'an without knowledge and according to his own desire, should prepare to take his place in Hell."*<sup>106</sup>

Now, consider that there are fully fifteen major sciences relating only to the Qur'an that one needs to master before one can begin to interpret it. The science of hadith literature is even more detailed, and more confusing than Qur'anic exegesis. This is without taking into consideration: mastery over the grammatical forms, vocabulary, idioms and rhetoric of the primordial Arabic as spoken in the time of Rasulullah ﷺ, the opinions of the mujtahid companions on a whole host of issues, an almost intuitive grasp of the principles of Islamic law, and other sciences as well. It would be impossible even for a scholar in this day and age, let alone an ordinary Muslim, to be able to synthesise all these diverse principles and sciences in order to deduce the correct way of life.

This vital duty of inferring shari'ah rulings from the source

<sup>106</sup> at-Tirmidhi (hasan sahih).



texts is one that very few scholars in the history of Islam have been adjudged capable of performing. It is through these devoted and brilliant ulama that Islamic law has been codified and simplified for the rest of the Muslim community. It is for this reason that Allah commands us:

*"Oh ye who believe! Obey Allah, obey His Messenger, and those charged with authority amongst yourselves..."*<sup>107</sup>

In addition, Rasulullah ﷺ has said, "Verily, Allah will not allow my community to agree on error."<sup>108</sup> and, "the Hand of Allah is upon the majority (of righteous scholars),"<sup>109</sup> and further, "stay close to the majority (opinion), for verily shaytaan is a wolf, and a wolf devours stray sheep."<sup>110</sup> The only group that will attain salvation, according to another hadith, is 'those who follow my way and the way of those rightly-guided successors that follow me,' – that is, 'the people who adhere to the Sunnah and the consensus of the Muslim ummah'. According to the principles of jurisprudence, the majority opinion of the pious scholars of Islam (*ulama al-haq*) even has a stronger weight than a weak or disputed hadith. It is for these reasons that their opinion forms the third tier of proof for an Islamic argument.

In this section, we will examine the views of some of the most renowned and illustrious Islamic scholars on the subject of tasawwuf (which revolves around the peeri-mureedi relationship). Those mentioned are either men whose opinions have been authoritative for all groups and at all times in Muslim history, or those who champion the differing schools of thought prevalent in today's community.

At the outset, we should note that the majority of Islamic

107 an-Nisa, (4:59)

108 at-Tirmidhi

109 al-Bukhari, Muslim (the explanation is the muhaddiths' commentary)

110 Ahmad and others

scholars, who have attained legendary status for their prowess in shari'ah (external knowledge), have also been either masters of tasawwuf or disciples of the Sufis. The people of living hearts (*ulul albab*) have always recognised that ilm al-Ihsan, or Sufism, is an essential component of Islamic education. Without it, the seeker of knowledge is in grave danger of becoming hypocritical and corrupt.

We have not seen fit here to mention the views of the innumerable saints and Sufis who have also been great imams of shari'ah. These men and women, remembered for their saintliness, humility, abstinence and miraculous feats, were also famous in their time for their profound grasp of Islamic law. A prime example of this is Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, who was a major jurist of his time. He used to solve complicated cases of fiqh – according to both Hanbali and Shafi'i law – referred to him from every part of the Islamic empire. To examine the opinions of the Sufis on peeri-mureedi would be an exercise in futility – akin to asking Imam Abu Hanifah his view of fiqh and shari'ah. Their anecdotes, instructions and advice on the necessity of having a spiritual guide would run into many volumes.

#### THE FOUR IMAMS

The four great imams of fiqh are the most authoritative source on Islamic law after the mujtahid sahaba and the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself. The schools of thought they founded have been in existence since the second century of Islamic history. Their formulations of shari'ah are so comprehensive that their principles of derivation have remained virtually unchanged for over a thousand years. History shows that the imams were disciples of Sufi masters, and all had great love for the Sufis and unbounded respect for tasawwuf.

IMAM ABU HANIFAH was said to be master of the Sufi way (tariqah). He received inner guidance from, among others, Ibrahim Adham and Imam Jafar as-Sadiq. He is mentioned in some spiritual chains of narration as the grandshaykh of Ma'ruf Karkhi, who was



in turn one of the spiritual elders of the great Sufi master Junaid al-Baghdadi. He was reported to have said,

"If it were not for two years, I would have perished. For two years I accompanied Sayyidina Ja'far as-Sadiq and acquired the spiritual knowledge that made me a knower ('arif) in the Way [of tasawwuf]"<sup>111</sup>

IMAM ASH-SHAFI'I was the student of Dhun-Nun al-Misri and also took knowledge from al-Fudhayl bin Ayaz and Nafisa al-Tahirah. He was very strict regarding Sufi imposters (an important topic that will be discussed later, insha-allah), and opponents of tasawwuf usually misapply his comments about them to include all Sufis. Some of his many sayings in favour of the people of tasawwuf, some of whom were his own shaykhs, include the following,

"three things have been made beautiful to me: avoiding affectation [ostentation]; treating people with compassion and kindness; and the ways of tasawwuf."<sup>112</sup>

"I accompanied the Sufis for ten years and benefited from three statements: their statement that time is a sword: if you do not cut it it cuts you, that deprivation is immunity, and that if you do not keep your ego busy with truth it will keep you busy with falsehood."<sup>113</sup>

"Be at the same time a faqih and a Sufi."<sup>114</sup>

IMAM AHMAD BIN HANBAL initially distrusted the Sufis, but

111 All from Ibn Abidin's Radd al-Muhtar, vol 1

112 Kashf al-Khafa

113 Manaqib al-Shafi'i of Imam Bayhaqi. Also Suyuti in Ta'yid al-Haqiqah al-'Aliya and others. I have paraphrased slightly due to space constraints.

114 Diwan Imam Shafi'i

after meeting some of them, he changed his mind. About them he said,

"I don't know any people better than them." Someone said to him: "they listen to music and reach states of ecstasy." He replied: "Do you prevent them from enjoying an hour with Allah?"<sup>115</sup>

He was a great admirer of Bishr al-Hafi, though his pupils could not understand why Imam bin Hanbal – the greatest scholar of his age – would frequent the company of a bare-footed mendicant. He replied, "I know more about hadith, fiqh, theology and science than he, but he knows more about my Lord than I."<sup>116</sup>

IMAM MALIK BIN ANAS enjoined tasawwuf as an obligatory duty, especially upon scholars. He gave one of the most succinct and profound expositions of the true path of Islam when he said,

"One who studies tasawwuf and doesn't study fiqh will become a heretic; one who studies fiqh and doesn't study tasawwuf will become corrupted; but one who studies both will reach the path of Truth."<sup>117</sup>

#### LATER MUJADDID IMAMS AND SCHOLARS

We will now examine the opinions of later famous scholars, including some who were acknowledged as Mujaddid Imams.<sup>118</sup> Several mujaddids were primarily recognised as masters of tasawwuf, such as Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, and Shah Waliullah, so their views need not be considered

115 Ghidha' al-Albab, vol 1

116 Tadhkhirat al-auliya

117 Qawaid at-Tasawwuf, and others

118 Those who, according to hadith in Ahmad, are sent at the beginning of each Islamic century to renew Islam from within.



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111 All from Ibn Abidin's Radd al-Muhtar, vol 1

112 Kashf al-Khafa

113 Manaqib al-Shafi'i of Imam Bayhaqi. Also Suyuti in Ta'yid al-Haqiqah al-'Aliyya and others. I have paraphrased slightly due to space constraints.

114 Diwan Imam Shafi'i

115 Ghidha' al-Albab, vol 1

116 Tadhkhirat al-auliya

117 Qawaid at-Tasawwuf, and others

118 Those who, according to hadith in Ahmad, are sent at the beginning of each Islamic century to renew Islam from within.



here. The scholars mentioned in this section have been drawn from all specialities of Islamic law – fiqh, hadith, tafsir, theology and philosophy – so as to give us as wide a range as possible. Some of them, such as Imam Ghazali, transcended these boundaries, and were acknowledged as imams of such profound learning that they could have founded their own madhabs.

IMAM GHAZALI, known as the 'Proof of Islam,' has been called the greatest theologian of Islam. He is one of the greatest figures, not only in the history of Islam, but in the entire history of human thought. In the latter part of his life, after spending twelve years with the Sufis, he wrote masterworks in various specialisations of Islamic law, including his incomparable *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, about which has been said, "if all the books of Islam were lost, and only the *Ihya* remained, it would suffice to revive Islam."<sup>119</sup> He was not only a great Sufi, but regarded tasawwuf as *fard al-ayn* (an obligation on every individual Muslim). Among the many commendations he gave was,

"the Sufis are the seekers in Allah's way, their conduct is the best conduct, THEIR WAY IS THE BEST WAY, and their manners (adab) are the most sanctified. They have cleansed their hearts from other-than-Allah and have made them as pathways for rivers to run, receiving knowledge of the Divine Presence."<sup>120</sup>

IMAM AN-NAWAWI, shaykh al-Islam, was one of the two greatest latter day hadith masters and mujtahid jurist of the Shafi'i madhab. As with Ghazali, he authored masterworks in virtually every major science of Islam. His superlative commentary of *Sahih al-Muslim* ranks second only to Ibn Hajar's *Fath al-Bari* in terms of the honour in which it is held. Possibly his most famous work, the great compilation of 2000 hadith relating to adab, good character and

<sup>119</sup> Imam Safadi in his biographical work *al-Wafi bi'l Wafayat*. A similar view was attributed to an-Nawawi by al-Zabidi in *'Ithaf al-Sada al-Muttaqin*.

<sup>120</sup> *al-Munqidh min ad-Dalaal*, his autobiographical work.

virtues - *Riyad as-Salihin* - was effectively his manual of the Sufi way. He was one of the great Sufi scholars and widely acknowledged as a saint. Apart from the numerous books he authored on tasawwuf (such as *Bustan al-'Arifin*), he said,

"the specifications of the Sufi way are ... to keep the presence of Allah in your heart in public and private, to follow the Sunnah of Rasulullah ﷺ by actions and speech... and to refer your matters to Allah."<sup>121</sup>

IBN KHALDUN, one of the great thinkers and historians of Islam. Originally from North Africa, he travelled the length and breadth of the Islamic world, serving as a Qadi in many places. He wrote '*al-Muqaddimah*', which traced the history of civilisation and ranks as the first recorded philosophy of history. He concluded,

"the way of Sufis is the WAY OF THE SALAF – the scholars among the sahaba, the tabi'een and their followers ... their way is the way of truth and guidance ... its origin is to worship Allah."<sup>122</sup>

IMAM AL-QUSHAYRI one of the early muhadditheen, he authored a highly specialised commentary of the Qur'an regarding its subtleties and allusions (*Lata'if al-Isharat*). He was most renowned, however, for his *Risalah*, one of the earliest manuals of tasawwuf. In it he exclaimed,

"Allah made this group the best of his saints and HONOURED THEM ABOVE ALL OF HIS SERVANTS AFTER THE PROPHETS. He made their hearts the secrets of His divine presence ... they are the means (wasilah) of mankind ... He made them to shine in His existence and to appear as the lights of His Light."<sup>123</sup>

IMAM ASH-SHATIBI, one of the greatest of the *usuliyin* (the

<sup>121</sup> *al-Maqasid fi'tawhid*

<sup>122</sup> *al-Muqaddimah*

<sup>123</sup> *ar-Risalat al-Qushayriyyah*



masters of the principles of jurisprudence). His works in this field have become the standard for all those who have followed. He was a disciple of Abu Abdullah al-Maqqari. He said,

“the very first foundation of their path is the Sunnah and the avoidance of what leaves it ... [those who] preserved their hearts from heedlessness became unique ... under the name of tasawwuf.”<sup>124</sup>

IMAM AS-SUYUTI, was the Mujaddid imam of the tenth century. A scholar of unparalleled genius and learning, he authored nearly fifty books covering every aspect of Islamic science. Among them were his *Alfiyya fi Ilm al-Hadith*, a thousand line poem in the hadith sciences. His great Qur’anic works, *Tafsir al-Jalalain*, *ad-Durr al-Manthur* and *al-Itqan* remain standard texts for ulama to this day. He declared,

“Sufism is in itself the BEST AND MOST HONOURABLE KNOWLEDGE. It explains how to follow the Sunnah and leave innovation ... pursuit of the sciences of the heart (ie: tasawwuf) ... is an obligation on every Muslim (fard al-ayn).”<sup>125</sup>

### THE ‘OPPONENTS’ OF TASAWWUF

Sufism has been an integral part of Islam from its very inception. As we have seen, even the earliest and most revered of scholars have not only acknowledged and accepted it, but have themselves been active practitioners. Certainly since the fifth century, it has been universally accepted as synonymous with Islam. However, modern times have witnessed an uprising against it. Its opponents (calling themselves ‘revivalists’) have attempted to prove – ironically, much as the western Orientalists did – that it is a bid’ah, a perversion, and not part of true Islam. Modern Muslim writers draw much of their

124 al-I’tisaam

125 Ta’yid al-Haqiqah al-Aliyya

information from the scholars who will be discussed in this section.

AHMAD IBN TAYMIYYAH<sup>126</sup> was one of the most famous and controversial scholars of the khalaf (the period after the salaf as-salihin). Rarely has a figure incited such opposing views; from his followers, who consider him to be a mujaddid and Shaykh al-Islam, to his enemies, who regarded him as a misguided misguider. In modern times, it is virtually impossible to obtain an unbiased opinion about Ibn Taymiyyah, and this in itself stands as testimony to his impact on Islamic history. However, we take refuge in the majority opinion of the learned scholars regarding his status, as reported most succinctly by his own pupil, ad-Dhababi, who said, “he was considered by many wise men to be an ERUDITE, LEARNED AND SCHOLARLY INNOVATOR.”<sup>127</sup>

His brilliance in many fields of Islamic knowledge is unquestionable, although some of his views on ‘aqidah (doctrinal belief) were unprecedented and harmful bid’ah. He was condemned by the majority of scholars in his own time, and for the most part his aberrant views were ignored for centuries. His works were revived in latter days, however, and have proven to be the primary source of inspiration for the Wahhabi school, as well as several modernist movements. It is therefore often assumed that he must have been a staunch foe of Sufism.

This, however, could not be further from the truth. In fact, he was a shaykh of the Qadiriyyah silsila, a spiritual inheritor – through two shaykhs – of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani himself. Although he disapproved of much which most scholars have found unobjectionable (such as tawassul), an entire volume of his great work, *Majmu’at al-Fatawa*, is devoted to tasawwuf. Among the

<sup>126</sup> Considerable space has been devoted to Ibn Taymiyyah’s biography because, more than any other scholar, his views are the basis of the Wahhabi, Salafi and other ‘neo-orthodox’ movements. It is therefore essential for people to gain some understanding of the great strengths and clear weaknesses of this extremely important figure.

<sup>127</sup> From his *Bayan Zaghl al-Ilm*, reported by as-Sakhawi in *al I’lan*.



many compliments he pays them are,

"so you will find them the FOREMOST IN NEARNESS by virtue of their striving. The Sufi is one who purifies himself from everything which distracts him from the remembrance of God ... just as when on Hajj, one needs a guide to reach the Ka'ba, these shaykhs are our guide to Allah and His Prophet." <sup>128</sup>

IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYYA, the pupil, disciple and foremost successor of Ibn Taymiyyah, he perpetuated the anthropomorphic doctrines of his master. He also achieved great fame as a brilliant scholar in his own right. However, he echoed Imam Shafi'i when he said, "*among THE BEST OF PEOPLE is a Sufi learned in fiqh*." <sup>129</sup> He also said,

"Religion consists entirely of good character (al-khuluq). Whoever surpasses you in character surpasses you in religion, and the same is true of tasawwuf." <sup>130</sup>

IMAM IBN AL-JAWZI, was one of the greatest Hanbali scholars of the khalaf. Some, in fact, have theorised that it was he who was the major systematizer of the Hanbali madhab. His greatest achievement was to gather all the various narrations of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (who disapproved of his verdicts being written down) and construct from them a systematic body of opinion (madhab).

His book, *Tablis Iblis* (the Machinations of Satan), is the most often-quoted early classical work condemning Sufism. However, it is less well known that this book is actually a condemnation of evil innovation and heresy in every field of Islamic science and religion. Certain heretical perversions of tasawwuf are just one of the targets of his wrath. He also wrote a five-volume eulogy of the Sufis, in

128 Majmu'at al-Fatawa, vol 11. The latter is specifically a reference to his own spiritual elders such as al-Junaid, Ma'ruf al-Kharkhi and others.

129 Manazil as-Sa'ireen

130 Madarij as-Salikeen

which he said:

They are the fewest in number, but the GREATEST IN RANK before Allah. Through them Allah preserves His proofs until they bequeath it to those like them (before passing on) and plant it firmly in their hearts [ie: peeri-mureedi]. By them knowledge has taken by assault the reality of things, so that they found easy what those given to comfort found hard, and found intimacy in what the ignorant found desolate. They accompanied the world with bodies whose spirits were attached to the highest regard (al-mahall al-a'la). Ah, ah! How one yearns to see them!" <sup>131</sup>

MUHAMMAD BIN ABD AL-WAHHAB, the founder and spiritual leader of the Wahhabi movement and one of the most virulent opponents of tasawwuf ever known. The widespread persecution of Sufis and the Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jama'ah perpetrated by his followers has been recorded in detail by scholars, as has their destruction of many holy sites in the Hijaz. His views on tasawwuf, recently published by the University of Ibn Saud, therefore provide the most astounding conclusions of all.

"among them [the adherents of religion] are those who devote themselves to worship and the hereafter, such as the Sufis. This religion encompasses ... jurisprudence and tasawwuf." <sup>132</sup>

It should be apparent from the above quotations that the majority of scholars of Islam, up to and including the very greatest among them, have not only supported, approved of, and honoured tasawwuf and the Sufis, but have actively practised it themselves. Even those who are held up as the most staunch and eminent foes of Sufism have been shown to be not only in favour of it, but accomplished practitioners and even disciples of those they apparently opposed.

131 Sifat as-Safwa

132 Fatawa wa rasa'il, from the third volume of his complete works.



The above is a very concise survey of the views of scholars, taken from - *inter alia* - Shaykh Hisham Kabbani's 'Encyclopaedia of Islamic Doctrine.' Here he has presented detailed comments from nearly fifty of the greatest scholars of Islam on the subject of tasawwuf. If one is not satisfied with the above, then it is our humble opinion that this constitutes *jamhur* (a definite consensus).

In addition, a brief review of the classical literature of Islam will reveal that tasawwuf was an indispensable, even commonplace, part of the life of scholar and common man alike for the majority of Islam's history. Tasawwuf is mentioned in scholarly works with a frequent ease that denotes an intimate familiarity. The Sufi masters are honoured and praised just as often, and their explanations, understandings and commentary of Islamic sciences are mentioned along with the views of more conventional scholars.

In that bygone, enlightened era of Traditional Islam - the golden age of world civilisation - tasawwuf and shari'ah were entwined, each supporting, advancing and strengthening the other. It is no coincidence that virtually all of these scholars - some of the greatest and most enlightened that have ever lived - were born, educated and raised to mastery in an environment saturated with tasawwuf.

This, then, has been the consensus judgment on tasawwuf and peeri-mureedi through all our history and across the entire Islamic world. Those who seek to deny or refute it - as well as those who still have doubts about its validity - need to be aware that they are contesting the explicit understanding of the greatest and wisest minds that nearly fifteen hundred years of Islam have produced. One should also remember the hadith of Rasulullah ﷺ, which has been reported through so many different chains that some scholars have declared it mutawatir (mass-transmitted, so that belief in it is obligatory), "my community will NEVER agree upon error."<sup>133</sup>

<sup>133</sup> al-Bukhari, Muslim; with different wording in at-Tirmidhi and others.

"Bring forth your proof, if ye be indeed truthful."<sup>134</sup>

It is hoped that, in the preceding pages, the proofs of tasawwuf and peeri-mureedi have now been firmly established from the Qur'an, Sunnah, reasoned argument and the considered opinions of the righteous scholars. As stated repeatedly, this is merely an overview. Each of the points presented could be (and have been) taken to much greater depth by more learned scholars. Furthermore, at every step, there are further arguments and factors have been either briefly touched on, or not mentioned at all.

We have attempted, in all earnest, to adhere to the demand of the Qur'an stated above. It is our humbly stated view that the evidence given in the preceding chapters ranks as more than sufficient proof for the absolute necessity of tasawwuf and the peeri-mureedi bond. More than this, we cannot do save to trust our affairs to the hands of the Most Merciful and pray that He guides all of us aright. We hope that this is nourishment enough for those who hunger.

<sup>134</sup> Sura al-Baqarah, v 111



## THE QUALITIES OF THE SHAYKH

*Beware of whom you take to be your murshid! The genuine shaykh possesses certain pre-requisites and embodies certain qualities, foremost of which are adherence to the shari'ah and possession of the Khilafat ar-Rasulullah ﷺ.*

Taking into account all that has been discussed, a crucial question now needs to be explored: who is a shaykh, and who is not? In a practical sense, this is probably important chapter in the book. From the very inception of Islam, Muslims have been warned about hypocrites (*munafiqin*)<sup>135</sup>: those who pretend to be what they are not. The hypocrites are indeed the most dangerous of enemies to Muslims, for they conceal the evil of their true natures beneath the garb of piety and righteousness. Just as they lived among the first blessed community in Madinah, have they been present throughout Islamic history.

Many are those who, witnessing the unbounded love and devotion that saints have inspired, have desired to attain that respect without having to undergo the tremendous sacrifices of the Sufis. Because of this, the true Sufis have always been surrounded by frauds, as thorns and mud surround roses. Indeed, Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, in his enumeration of the heretical sects, lists no fewer than fifteen (out of seventy-one) that pretend to be Sufis.<sup>136</sup>

He and other Sufi masters have divided the followers of the mystic path into three categories, each one corresponding to one of the three basic states of the soul mentioned in the Qur'an. The

<sup>135</sup> It should be noted at this point that there is a distinction between hypocrisy in the essentials of faith, as was the state of the Madinan hypocrites, and hypocrisy in state or action, which very few are free of.

<sup>136</sup> Al-Ghunya, vol 1

first is the SUFI – one who has reached his destination, perfected his inner self and achieved the exalted state of *nafs al-mutma'innah* (the soul at peace). The second is the MUTASAWWIF – one who is still attempting to reach Allah through strict spiritual discipline and devotion under the guidance of a shaykh. To him belongs the rank of *nafs al-lawwama* (the self-accusing soul). The third is called the MUSTASWIF – the fraud who dresses and behaves like a Sufi in order to attain worldly fame and wealth. His is the lot of *nafs al-ammara bi-su* (the self-abasing soul).<sup>137</sup>

The Sufi shaykhs are drawn primarily from the ranks of the first, and occasionally from the mutasawwif. Unfortunately, many of those who claim to be Sufis are in fact frauds, and rather than leading people to guidance will certainly lead them astray. As al-Hujwiri stated, "once Sufism was a reality without a name; today it is a name without a reality."<sup>138</sup> Just as it is essential to have a shaykh, it is critically important to exercise caution in choosing one, for as Allah says,

*"On that day shall We call all of mankind behind their Imams (leaders)"*<sup>139</sup>

There are certain pre-requisites that one should look for in a potential shaykh. In brief, these are: his knowledge of and adherence to the shari'ah, his degree of ihsan, his silsilah, and his khilafah (permission to induct others in the way). The performance of miracles (*karamaat*), though not uncommon among Sufis, is NOT a requirement.

### ADHERENCE TO THE SHARI'AH

*"Righteousness is that you believe in Allah ... And spend of your*

<sup>137</sup> Al-Ghunya, vol 5

<sup>138</sup> Kashf al-Mahjub

<sup>139</sup> al-Isra (17:71)



*wealth out of love for him ... and establish prayer ... and fulfill your oaths ... and to be firm and patient – Such are the people of truth.”*<sup>140</sup>

The master must have adequate knowledge of fiqh and all necessary matters of shari`ah. He must hold the correct doctrinal beliefs according to the Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah, and be cognisant of all the other conditions of faith (iman). It is not necessary for the shaykh to have advanced qualifications in the fields of hadith, jurisprudence, tafsir or theology. Just as others have devoted their lives to each of these fields of specialty, the Sufi has devoted his to the mastery of the science of ihsan.

In addition to knowledge, it goes without saying that the shaykh must observe not merely follow the shari`ah, but be an embodiment of the Sunnah both in letter and in spirit. Shari`ah is the very basis and foundation stone of tasawwuf; without it, there can be no tasawwuf. This has been discussed in detail in the preceding chapters. Shaykh Abdul Qadir once said,

*“if a man claiming to be a saint does not adhere to the very letter and spirit of the shari`ah, then even though he may perform miracles that astound the mind, you must not follow him. He is misguided and a deception.”*

A man came to the company of Junaid al-Baghdadi. However, after spending thirty years with him, he still had not become a mureed. When the saint asked him the reason, he replied, ‘in all this time, I have never seen you perform a miracle.’ Junaid replied, ‘in thirty years, have you ever seen me go against the sunnah?’ The man admitted that he had not, to which Junaid replied, ‘then what more evidence do you need?’

#### THE SILSILA

*“Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those who are with him are firm against the disbelievers, compassionate towards each other ... Upon their foreheads are the marks of prostration.”*<sup>141</sup>

Equally important is the fact that the shaykh himself has been the mureed of an authentic shaykh. In much the same way as the isnad of a hadith, the silsilah (chain of saints) must be unbroken from the shaykh right up to Rasulallah ﷺ himself, who is the leader and crown of all Sufis. Each link in that chain must be a Sufi renowned for his piety, devotion, sincerity and trustworthiness; one acknowledged by his contemporaries as qualified to instruct in the Sufi way. Any break in the chain, or any fatal flaw in the masters, disrupts and annuls the entire silsilah afterwards. The shaykh must have spent time in the company of his own master undergoing spiritual discipline, purification of the lower self (nafs) and perfecting his ihsan. This is crucial because, as many among both Salaf and Khalaf have remarked, ‘one who has no guide, his guide is the shaytan.’

#### THE KHILAFAH

*“And let there arise from among you a community who invite to goodness, enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency. Such are they who are successful.”*<sup>142</sup>

In addition to actually having a Sufi master, the shaykh must also fulfil another obligation: he must have been awarded khilafah (either from his own peer or from another). Khilafah literally means ‘vicegerency’ – that is, the permission to act as a deputy or representative. This is the equivalent of obtaining a university degree or diploma; it declares the shaykh competent, worthy of

<sup>140</sup> al-Baqarah, (2:177)

<sup>141</sup> al-Fath, (48:29)

<sup>142</sup> Aal Imran, (3:104)



inducting others into the spiritual path and guiding them along it. This is usually an explicit (and often written) declaration that leaves no one in any doubt as to its meaning or the recipient.

It is, in reality, a continuation of the mission and duty that Rasulallah ﷺ bequeathed unto his sahaba: to spread Islam by word and deed, to enjoin others to goodness, and to guide them along the straight path.

### THE FRAGRANCE OF IHSAN

*"Say thou: I call unto Allah – I, and those who follow me – by virtue of spiritual insight..."*<sup>143</sup>

The last and most mysterious of the requirements of a shaykh is ihsan – that is, he must have achieved full consciousness of Allah's presence. This particular pre-requisite presents a difficulty of recognition for the seeker. How is one supposed to judge the ihsan of another, when this is precisely what one has come to learn? The answer is that ihsan can be judged only by spending time in the presence of the shaykh. As Maulana Rumi said, *"Take refuge in silence. If you seek a sign, do not reveal yourself."*<sup>144</sup> The shaykh's consciousness of Allah will manifest itself in his speech, his actions, his silences and his manner.

In fact, it is a sign of mastery that when one sits with him, one feels the fragrance of faith and spiritual pleasure. Merely by being in his presence, love and compassion will blossom in the heart. He will not speak except for Allah, or to advise the good. The seeker will derive benefit merely from his company, as well as from his words. Furthermore, he will feel this spiritual fragrance whether or not he is in the company of his peer. The true master's conduct will be characterised by kindness, mercy, tenderness and love. One will behold among his disciples the picture of faith, sincerity, humility

143 Yusuf (12:108)

144 The Essential Rumi

and taqwa. As Rasulallah ﷺ has said, *"...(the best companion is) such a person who, when you see him, you remember Allah; when you listen to him, your knowledge of Islam increases; and when you see his actions, you are reminded about the life to come."*<sup>145</sup>

### THE IMAGE OF RASULULLAH

*"A blessed word is like a blessed tree; its root is firmly fixed and its branches (reach) to the heavens. It brings forth its fruit at all times by the leave of its Lord."*<sup>146</sup>

The Sufi shaykh is a veritable image of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. He reflects not only the external mannerisms and behaviours of Rasulallah ﷺ, but also the internal qualities of his character. Mufti Ahmad Yar Khan, in his commentary of these verses, has listed fifteen (Qur'anic) qualities of the Holy Prophet ﷺ that should be looked for in the Sufi shaykh, and that should be emulated by his disciples.<sup>147</sup> These qualities encompass three spheres of action – internal, personal and communal.

**QUALITIES OF HEART:** The shaykh's interior state exudes love for all creation; his worship is utterly sincere; he possesses dedication and firmness of purpose, he abides by lofty ideals; and, of course, he has a pure and incorruptible soul.

**QUALITIES OF PERSONALITY:** The shaykh is good-natured and approachable; he is of sober habits; he maintains physical cleanliness, finesse and neatness; he is compassionate towards all; and he is the model of humility despite his high rank.

**QUALITIES OF JUSTICE:** The shaykh is just and fair in his dealings with

145 Mishkaat al-Masabih

146 Ibrahim, (14:24-25)

147 Tafsir an-Na'imi



people; his business ethic is characterised by morality and decency; he is honest and uncorrupted in political issues; he conducts himself with nobility in disputes; and he fulfils his oaths and covenants.

Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, in a commentary on the hadith, "the knowers [of Allah] (*al-ulama*) are the inheritors of the Prophets,"<sup>148</sup> describes twelve essential attributes of the perfect murshid. He says:

"A spiritual teacher is not a true teacher unless he possesses twelve qualities. Two of these are from Allah Most High. They are to hide the faults of man ... and to have compassion and forgiveness for even the worst of sins. Two qualities are inherited from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ - love and gentleness. From Abu Bakr, truthfulness and sincerity (*sidq*) and devotion and generosity. From Umar, justice and enjoining good and forbidding evil. From Uthman, humility and staying awake and praying at night (*qiyam al-layl*). And from Ali, knowledge and courage."<sup>149</sup>

These are the pre-requisites and qualities of the Sufi shaykhs - may Allah bless them! Few indeed are those who can claim to have attained all of them, and fortunate indeed are those who wander into their company. Over and above this, it is of vital importance that the seeker's heart be inclined towards a particular shaykh. As will be discussed later, one of the essential components of the peer-mureed bond is *nisbah* (affection) between master and disciple. This is, however, a matter of the heart - no book or *mas'ala* can help the mureed decide for whom he feels this closeness.

This is but the mercy of God and a blessing from Him; one neither seeks it nor can obtain it without His will. Once the seeker has found those who meet the above requirements, he should rely on the yearning of his heart to guide him to the one who will be his

148 Muslim

149 Sirr al-Asrar

peer. As Abu Yazid al-Bistami said, 'That which we seek cannot be found by searching, but only seekers find it...'



## ADAB - THE ETIQUETTE OF CONDUCT

*The mureed's etiquette of conduct with the shaykh is modelled on the behaviour of the sahaba towards Rasulullah ﷺ. It is the counter-balancing of love and respect. Upon the spiritual path, the correct attitude towards the teacher plays a central role in tazkiyyah of the mureed.*

Having explored the need for and proofs of peeri-mureedi, we will now briefly look into the rights of the shaykh, as well as the etiquette and manners required of the seeker. Rather than merely present a list of rules, we will explore different aspects of the relationship; taking, as before, the Qur'an, the Sunnah and sayings of the righteous as our guidelines.

The nature of the peer-mureed relationship is the foundation of tasawwuf, and the discussion of its adab (etiquette) forms the central topic of virtually every Sufi manual. Khwaja Habib Ali Shah, the founder and master of the Chishtiyyah Habibiyyah silsilah, has written a four hundred page treatise devoted only to this topic entitled, 'Habib at-Talibin.'

The underlying principles governing this relationship are two-fold: LOVE and RESPECT. It is from these fundamental starting points that all the etiquette of conduct (adab) is drawn. Each is as important as the other; figuratively speaking, love provides the fuel for the journey, while respect delineates the boundaries of the pathway. The archetype or primary model for the relationship between shaykh and mureed, as we have noted before, is that between Rasulullah ﷺ and his sahaba. The sahaba were the original and most ideal of mureeds; we follow in their footsteps and take our light from their lamp. The Sunnah is replete with examples of both their unbounded love and their profound respect for the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

Anas bin Nadhr, upon hearing (incorrectly) that Rasulullah ﷺ had perished at Uhud, exclaimed, 'then who would like to live after him?' and plunged grief-stricken into the heart of the enemy ranks to be martyred. A woman of the Ansar, having lost her husband, father and brother at Uhud, cried upon seeing Rasulullah r ﷺ 'the death of all my family has lost its sting upon seeing you (alive and well)!'<sup>150</sup>

However, perhaps the greatest testimony to the respect and reverence in which Rasulullah r was held came from his enemy, 'Urwah bin Masud. It forms the standard and yardstick by which mureeds should measure their conduct with their shaykh. The ambassador of the Quraysh told his chieftains:

"I have been to the courts of Caesar, Kisrau (the Persian Emperor) and the Negus of Abyssinia. Nowhere have I found a people as respectful to their ruler as (the sahaba). When Muhammad spits, they rush to catch his sputum before it touches the ground and anoint their faces with it. Hardly a word escapes his lips before they rush to carry out his order. When he makes wudhu, they fight with one another to collect some drop of that used water ... when they speak in his presence, they speak in low tones. They do not even lift their gazes to look at his face, out of reverence for him. A hair falling from his beard or head is preserved as a benediction from which blessings can be obtained, and looked upon as a sacred relic. I have never seen a people so devoted to their master as the Companions of the Prophet."<sup>151</sup>



## BAY'AH - THE PLEDGE OF FEALTY

*Bay'ah is an essential but forgotten Sunnah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. It is a pledge of loyalty, through the shaykh, to the Holy Prophet ﷺ and Allah. It is, effectively, an oath of obedience to Allah that continues throughout one's life. This is the first step along the path to God.*

The first obligation towards one's shaykh, which also forms the initiation into the Sufi order, is the pledge (bay'ah). This involves placing one's hand in the master's and swearing allegiance to him. He will then proceed to make you swear - through him - to his murshid, and so on until the ultimate pledge of loyalty and obedience is given to Rasulullah ﷺ and Allah. It is, in fact, a sign of acquiescence to the following Quranic verse:

*"Verily those who plight their fealty to thee, do no less than plight their fealty to Allah. The Hand of Allah is over their hands. Then anyone who violates his oath does so to the harm of his own soul; and anyone who fulfils what he has covenanted with Allah, Allah will soon grant him a mighty Reward."*<sup>152</sup>

Bay'ah is an important sunnah of Rasulullah ﷺ by which the sahaba formally and ritually pledged their loyalty and obedience to him. It was most famously performed at al-Aqaba in the ninth year of Revelation by the Madinans and then at Hudhaybiya by the sahaba in 6AH. When the caliphate passed to the khulufah ar-raashideen, those who were not able to make bay'ah to Rasulullah ﷺ pledged their loyalty to his successors instead. By doing so, they were in effect swearing allegiance to Allah and Rasulullah ﷺ - for

152 Sura al-Fath, v 10

they were both the temporal and spiritual inheritors of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

After Sayyidina Ali's assassination, and especially after the passing of the last sahaba khalifa, Sayyidina Mu'awiya, the leadership of the Umma passed to the hands of lesser men. Though political fealty was still pledged to the worldly and often corrupt rulers of the Umayyad and Abbasid empires, they were manifestly unworthy of inheriting the spiritual vicegerency of Rasulullah ﷺ. Instead, they relinquished the spiritual authority of Islam to the great saints and imams among the tabi'in.

From them it has passed, heart to heart, from master to disciple, from saint to saint, down through the ages. This khilafah (spiritual vicegerency of Allah) is the reality of the hadith that, *"the knowers (of Allah) are the inheritors of the office of prophethood."*<sup>153</sup>

Thus performing bay'ah to the shaykh is no small thing. It is an extension of the original oath, sworn by the sahaba beneath the tree in Hudhaybiya upon the blessed hand of Rasulullah ﷺ himself. It is a sunnah that has fallen into disuse, and as the famous hadith states, *"the reward of reviving a forgotten sunnah is that of one hundred martyrs."*<sup>154</sup>

To the objection that this deferred pledge is invalid because it is sworn to a substitute, sufficient answer is given in the Qur'anic verse quoted at the head of this chapter. Although the sahaba were outwardly taking bay'ah with the Holy Prophet ﷺ, they were at the same time swearing upon Allah Himself. Furthermore, the tabi'in, who were unable to directly make bay'ah with Rasulullah ﷺ, instead swore upon the hands of the sahaba (not only the khulufah ar-raashideen, as those who claim that bay'ah is only for rulers insist, but also sahaba not in political positions).

So it has continued throughout the ages. In the same way, as we are not able to personally give allegiance to Allah or the Holy

<sup>153</sup> al-Bukhari, Muslim

<sup>154</sup> Muslim



Prophet ﷺ, we swear it instead to his spiritual successors – the Sufi masters.

Rasulullah ﷺ accepted three main types of bay'ah: THE PLEDGE OF JIHAD (that one will wage war for Islam), THE PLEDGE OF IMAN, and what has come to be known as THE PLEDGE OF TARIQAH. This is an oath that one will follow the laws of Islam, both internal and external, and strive along the straight path. It is this last kind that is sworn to the Sufi masters – although if a non-Muslim makes bay'ah, he automatically gives a pledge of iman as well. The bay'ah at-tariqah is established by several narrations including the following:

*"... Rasulullah ﷺ said, 'will you not make bay'ah to God's messenger?' We stretched out our hands and enquired, 'on what, oh Rasulullah?' He replied, 'that you worship Allah, associating none with Him, that you establish the prayer, and that you*

*HEAR AND OBEY.'"* <sup>155</sup>

These blessed words of the Holy Prophet r are almost exactly the same as those used by the peers, both ancient and modern, during this simple, yet powerful, ceremony. The bay'ah is the first step along the journey to God. It is a solemn oath that binds one to follow the injunctions of Islam, strive hard along the way of the blessed ones, and obey Allah and His Rasul ﷺ - accepting and adhering to the shaykh's guidance in this - in both external and internal conduct. It is a microcosm of one's entire relationship with the murshid, and holding faithfully to this oath renders one's bond both beautiful and fruitful.

155 Muslim, Abu Dawud

## NISBAH - THE BOND OF LOVE

*It is essential for there to be a sense of connection - of love and affection - (nisbah) between the shaykh and mureed. This is the essence of the bond and everything is predicated (depends) upon it. This encompasses love, respect and faithfulness to him.*

"For the teacher, love cannot be more or less ... his love for the disciple does not go on increasing; it is a closed circle. For the disciple, of course, it is very different. As the disciple goes on, he feels that the master is nearer and nearer. But the master is not nearer – he was always near, only the disciple did not discern it." <sup>156</sup>

The secret of tasawwuf is love. As Khwaja Mu'in ad-Deen al-Chishti said in his last sermon, *"love all and hate none. Mere talk of peace (Islam) will avail you naught. Mere talk of God and religion will not carry you far."* <sup>157</sup> Of this love, much has already been said, and as for the wisdom of the Sufis on the matter, it would run into many volumes. The eyes of love gaze in two directions – one faces God and His Messenger ﷺ in adoration, the other towards the rest of His creation in mercy and compassion. Rasulullah ﷺ has said,

*"You cannot be a true believer until you love Allah and His Rasul r more than your parents, your children and all of mankind,"* <sup>158</sup> and, *"you cannot enter paradise until you are a believer, and you cannot be a believer until you love one another..."* <sup>159</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Bhai Sahib, from 'Travelling the Path of Love'

<sup>157</sup> The Big Five of India in Sufism

<sup>158</sup> al-Bukhari, Muslim

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<sup>159</sup> Muslim



## A BOND OF LOVE

The love between shaykh and disciple is a journey in itself. In its beginning stages, it is of the type mentioned in the latter hadith; but its end-point and ultimate reality is nothing but the human equivalent of the Divine Love. At the outset, it is like the love between a parent and a child; in its finality it is as the love between Allah and His chosen servants. The Sufis term this perfection of love *fana fi-shaykh* (absorption in the shaykh), which is the precursor of *fana fi-Allah* (annihilation in Allah).

Thus at the very outset, one should bear in mind that *nisbah* (mutual affection between shaykh and mureed) is the single most important factor determining the success and failure of the spiritual journey. The reason for this is simple: the pleasure and displeasure of the shaykh - himself completely subsumed in God's love - is the pleasure and displeasure of Allah.<sup>160</sup> They have perfected their following of the Sunnah, in that they, 'love for God's love, and dislike for God's love.'

Furthermore, the shaykh, who has purified himself of his nafs and subordinated his own pleasure to that of Allah's, will follow the Sunnah even in his anger - that is, he will only become angry when the laws of Allah are broken. This is an extremely subtle and important point. The mureed may not be able to detect his own lapse, and when faced with the shaykh's displeasure, his own pride and anger may cause him to stray even further. It should always be kept in mind that a perfect shaykh seeks (and can obtain) nothing from the mureed that he cannot get from Allah.

*"Say: No reward do I ask of you for it but this: that each one who will may take a (straight) Path to his Lord."*<sup>161</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Proofs of this statement have already been mentioned in previous sections (the hadith of warring against the auliya; the hadith of Qurb an-Nawafil)

<sup>161</sup> al-Furqan, (32:57)

The shaykh's only concern is for the well-being of his followers; both his anger and his pleasure will be for the good of the mureed. As Maulana Rumi says, "*the happiness and wrath of the shaykh are like the sunshine and storms of spring - both are needed to make the rose blossom.*"<sup>162</sup>

## FAITHFULNESS

*"Allah has not made, for any man, two hearts within his breast."*<sup>163</sup>

Another important point regarding this issue is that of faithfulness. As a person has one God and one Prophet, so too must he have one shaykh. Those who shuttle between saintly people, seeking spiritual blessings and instruction from each, are misguided. It has been said that they are prostituting their souls. The bond of love is the crux of the seeker's suluk. It is not an easy thing to perfect, and it cannot develop at all if the mureed is trying to hedge his bets, dividing his devotion like a pie between as many peers as possible. As my murshid once said, '*when searching for water, don't dig one hundred holes, each one a metre deep. Dig one hole, a hundred metres deep!*'

LOVE NEEDS MUST BE SINCERE; ELSE IT IS NOT LOVE. Greed, even a greed for spiritual advancement, is a poor substitute for faithfulness, and can never be the basis of love or of worship. After all, the shaykh has naught to gain from the mureed except heartache and distraction from his Beloved. He is motivated by a selfless love for humanity that encompasses all people and all things. The least that he deserves from the mureed is full attention and one's complete and unqualified love.

Umar once told Rasulullah ﷺ, "I love you very much, but I do not feel that I love you more than my own self." Rasulullah ﷺ placed

<sup>162</sup> The Essential Rumi

<sup>163</sup> al-Ahzab (35:4)



his hands upon Umar's breast for a long moment ... then Umar exclaimed, "Ya Rasulullah! Now indeed do I love you even more than myself!" The Holy Prophet ﷺ replied, "Now, Umar [your faith has been perfected]!"<sup>164</sup>

A mu'min is one who is faithful – to his Lord, to his Prophet ﷺ, to his people, and to his own soul. It is only fitting that those who strive to attain such faithfulness should be faithful to their shaykh.

There was a poor carpenter of Baghdad used to refuse to look at Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani whenever he went past. The shaykh was curious to learn the reason, so he approached the man and asked him. The carpenter replied, "I am the mureed of a humble shaykh, who is in no way comparable to you. I am afraid that if I gaze at your spiritual beauty, I will be unfaithful to my own murshid."

Khwaja Sulayman Tawsawi, one of the grand-shaykhs of the Chisti Habibi silsilah, was sitting in the company of his murshid when the latter exclaimed, "whoever wants to meet Khidhr, go outside, for he is there!" All rushed out except for Sulayman, who said, "I will not go; you are Khidhr enough for me."

#### THE NISBAH OF THE SAHABA

When one explores the conduct of the sahaba, one finds that they were motivated by the love of Rasulullah ﷺ above all things. This devotion is clearly apparent in their establishment of Islam, their detailed narration of his Sunnah, their poetry and sayings, their lives and their deaths. It permeated every fibre of their being, and is one of the most crucial lessons that one learns from them. Rasulullah ﷺ said, "*follow my Sunnah and the Sunnah of my rightly guided followers after me. Hold fast it with all your might.*"<sup>165</sup> In this context, one could understand it as, '...follow the sunnah of their overwhelming love for me.' It is a pity that certain groups of the

164 Riyaad as-Saliheen

165 at-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud.

Community of Muhammad ﷺ seek to downplay this deep devotion, or describe it as everything except 'love'.

For they did indeed obey his ﷺ commands, but their submission was based not on fear, nor desire for reward, but the obedience of a lover to the command of his beloved. So too they kept his companionship, but only because they could not do without the perfume of his presence. The story of the sahaba is a love story in the truest sense of the phrase – a love that purified hearts, ennobled souls and forever transformed the world.

There are many examples of this intensity of love that one could quote, but perhaps the most poignant was their reaction to his passing away. Umar refused to believe that he could be dead; Ali locked himself in his house for six months. Fatimah, his beloved daughter, had died within months of a broken heart. Bilal left Madinah forever, unable to bear the memories of his master, and was never able to recite the adhan again because of an overwhelming grief. An old, unnamed woman cried herself to death whilst clinging to his grave. Abu Bakr, friend and confidant – so strong and composed at the time of his death – had broken down months earlier upon understanding that Sura al-Nasr was but a prophecy of his master's departure from the world. And may Allah be well-pleased with all of them.

Their feelings were eloquently echoed by Amir Khusro, the great poet, linguist and historian. Grief-stricken beyond consoling at the death of his master, Khwaja Nizam ad-Deen Auliya, he spontaneously composed the following Persian couplet,

*The beloved sleeps,  
Covering her face with the beautiful locks of her hair.  
Khusro, go home!  
The darkness of evening has engulfed the world."*<sup>166</sup>

166 Diwan Amir Khusro



## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF NISBAH

Part of the beauty and universality of Islam is that it is always possible to explain its teachings in ways that allow markedly different groups of people to understand it. Sayyidina Ali's famous saying, "*speak to people according to their level*," is not merely a reference to intellectual or spiritual ability, but also to the variety of ways in which cultures and groups interpret the world around them. In the modern, scientific age, it is similarly possible to explain many Islamic teachings according to our own peculiar 'twenty-first century' methods of interpreting life and reality.<sup>167</sup>

Given that the formal science of psychology is a modern invention, it is unsurprising that the psychology of Islam and tasawwuf has been touched upon by classical authors. However, modern scholars who have delved into this field are finding more and more psychological wisdom behind the teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the Sufi masters.

The success of peeri-mureedi, as has been said before, depends greatly on nisbah – that is, the bond of love and affection between the master and the disciple. However, to understand why this is the case, one needs to explore the psychological effects of love and devotion.

Allah has designed the soul in such a way that it is innately attracted to the beautiful qualities of His attributes – such as forgiveness, wisdom, beauty, justice, perfection, tranquillity, power and kindness. To put it another way, these concepts and spiritual values draw one towards them precisely because they are mortal reflections or reminders of Allah's beauty and majesty. All that is best in human nature is reflected either in these attributes, or in the

<sup>167</sup> This is not to say that this method is the best one, nor that all other approaches are mistaken. It is a grave misconception and arrogance to believe that, for one thing to be right, all others must be wrong. We are only performing 'taqrib', or 'a way of understanding truth', and this particular *taqrib* is one of many possible approaches to this issue. The Sufis have said, 'Allah is One, but the ways of approaching him are as numerous as the Children of Adam.'

the soul's response to them. For example, the soul's response to Allah's attribute of power (*al-Qadir*) is humility (*tawaddu'*); its response to Him being the Provider of all things (*ar-Razzaq*) is total reliance upon Him (*tawakkul*).

However, it is also part of human nature that what we truly respond to is not abstract concepts, BUT THEIR PRACTICAL APPLICATION. It is not the idea of mercy or justice that fills us with spiritual pleasure, but seeing a person being merciful or just. The wisdom of religion is that it is revealed to a 'man like us,' so we can see it in action. Deen is not stagnant, not theoretical, but lived and breathed. In this, the Sufi peer is truly the deputy of the Holy Prophet ﷺ (*khalifat ar-Rasulullah*), for he is a mirror-like reflection of these beautiful traits. The wisdom of peeri-mureedi is that it gives a living form to all these attributes and qualities. This form – the peer – demonstrates the true lofty potential of humanity to those not fortunate enough to have direct contact with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

The mureed thus develops a deep and abiding love for the shaykh, for he sees in him the perfect embodiment of these blessed characteristics of Allah and His Rasul ﷺ. Love, awe and admiration create an opening in his heart that the shaykh widens and strengthens. Overwhelmed by the constant witnessing of Allah's attributes in action – mercy, kindness, compassion, justice, wisdom and truth – his hard heart softens and becomes malleable, like clay on a pottery wheel. It is this softened heart that the shaykh then moulds into a state of *ihsan*.

One can read books of hadith and fiqh day and night, but if the heart is not pierced with love, the beautiful teachings of Islam will never enter into one's life. The ulama say, "knowledge is not in lines [on a page] (*sutur*) but in hearts (*sudur*)."<sup>168</sup> It is the love for the shaykh, which is in reality nothing but a love for Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, which causes the stony heart to become soft. Rumi says,



*You've been a rock too long now ...  
Crumble yourself, and wild flowers will spring up at your feet.  
Try something different.  
Surrender.*

SUHBA - THE PERFUME OF COMPANIONSHIP

*Nisba develops through companionship (suhba). Behave as though you are a sahaba in the presence of Rasulullah ﷺ and emulate their outer behavior and inner state of awe and devotion.*

Nisba develops most commonly through close association (suhba) with the shaykh. It is very important for the mureed to avail himself of the master's company as often as possible. In previous eras, sincere mureeds would actually move into their murshids' khanaqahs, spending day and night with them, sometimes for years on end. In modern times, of course, things are rather different. However, the company of the shaykh is surely precious enough to warrant sacrifice of time and effort. Rumi has said, "a moment in the company of a true master is more beneficial than one hundred years of devotion."<sup>168</sup>

A clear example of the benefits of suhba can be derived not only from the sahaba, who of course were the archetypical mureeds in the presence of the archetypical shaykh, but also from those who kept their company. A study of very early Islamic jurisprudence reveals that virtually all of the tabi'in hadith masters (*muhaddithin*) and jurists (*fuqaha*) were freed men (*mawali*) of great sahaba. It was to them that the crucial responsibility of issuing fatawa to the early Muslim community was entrusted.<sup>169</sup>

Thus Nafi' was the freed man of Ibn Umar; 'Ikrimah, the freed man of Ibn Abbas. So too 'Ata, the jurist of Makkah, Tawus of

<sup>168</sup> The Essential Rumi

<sup>169</sup> This refers to the very beginning stage of Islamic law, before the schools of the four *madhabs* or the science of hadith criticism had come into being.



Yemen, Ibrahim an-Nakha'i of Kufah and Hasan al-Basri, the Sufi and jurist of Basrah, were all freed men of the sahaba fuqaha.<sup>170</sup>

*"Oh ye who believe, fear Allah, and keep the company of the those who are true (in word and deed)."*<sup>171</sup>

It was because of their long and faithful association with the blessed Companions that they achieved such unparalleled distinction. Other underlying consequences and benefits of this suhba have already been discussed in detail, but there is a hadith that succinctly summarizes its importance.

*"Allah has said that it is incumbent upon Him to love those who love one another for His sake, who sit together for His sake, who visit each other for His sake, and who spend on one another for His sake."*<sup>172</sup>

It cannot be stressed enough, then, that one should frequent the shaykh's company, spend as much time with him as possible, and strive to please him in word, thought and deed. The relationship with the shaykh is the most important and profound in a person's life. It is a bond that, if true, will endure to the afterlife.<sup>173</sup> It is a bond that will be a cause of salvation and intercession on the Day of Judgement (insha-allah).<sup>174</sup> It is a seed that, if nurtured and cherished, will blossom into true love of Allah and Rasulullah ﷺ. It is upon this bond that the suluk revolves, so take care of it.

Even when one is not physically with the shaykh, one should bear in mind that he is spiritually with the mureed at all times. The

170 Usul al-Fiqh al-Islami

171 Tauba, (9:119)

172 Riyaad as-Salihin

173 From al-Bukhari, al-Muslim: "you will be with those you love..."

174 From al-Bukhari: "...then the prophets and angels AND THE BELIEVERS will intercede (for those in Hell)..."

truly devoted mureed, when separated from his shaykh, feels the pangs of that separation, like the lover parted from the beloved, like the reed-flute torn from the river-bed, like the soul veiled from its Lord. A sahaba came to the Holy Prophet ﷺ and lamented, "Oh Rasulullah! I love you more than my wife, my children and my own self. When I am at home and I think of you, I become restless, not content until I come over and behold you..."<sup>175</sup>

There are manners to be observed when in the presence of the shaykh; these are born out of one's intense respect for his person. Pay attention only to the shaykh. Do not even engage in worship without his permission, and certainly do not engage in conversation with others. In addition, sit respectfully, not lazily or with feet outstretched towards him. Pay attention to his words, his actions and his manner, for then will one appreciate the beauty of the sunnah.

#### THE SILENT IS SAVED...

*"Silence contains so many benefits that they cannot be explained. It makes breasts into treasure houses of pearls of wisdom."*<sup>176</sup>

The lot of a mureed in the presence of his shaykh is silence. No other condition is suitable for the ignorant in the company of a knower, for the foolish in the company of the wise, or for a flawed soul in the company of the perfect.

*"O ye who believe! Raise not your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud to him in talk as ye may speak aloud to one another, lest your deeds become vain and ye perceive not."*<sup>177</sup>

175 at-Tabarani

176 Farid ad-Deen Attar, cited in 'Shariat and Tasawwuf'

177 al-Hujurat, (49:2)



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170 Usul al-Fiqh al-Islami

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175 at-Tabarani

176 Farid ad-Deen Attar, cited in 'Shariat and Tasawwuf'

177 al-Hujurat, (49:2)



The Sunnah abounds with attestations of the sahabas' behavior in the presence of Rasulullah ﷺ, although it is not the explicit subject of any particular hadith. Most speak of the absolute silence that reigned as they sat engrossed in the words, and enchanted with the vision, of our Master ﷺ. Other reports describe that the sahaba used to sit so still and silently that birds could have nested on their heads. It is this model of conduct that is most fitting and appropriate for a believer and a mureed.

The company of a shaykh has been described as being more rewarding than a hundred years of worship. Every instant spent in his presence is precious, and it should not be spent expressing one's own opinions or arguments. Even the silence of a Sufi is filled with meaning and beauty. It is better by far to be silent, observe his manners, ways and personality; for even such seemingly trivial things are living embodiments of the Sunnah. Practice upon the hadith that states: "*He who maintains silence has achieved salvation.*"<sup>178</sup> The spiritual masters have stated that one should not even engage in recitation, dhikr, or salaah without his permission. Another hadith states that when a group of sahaba in Masjid an-Nabawi were engaged in dhikr and Rasulullah ﷺ came to them, they all became silent out of respect for him.<sup>179</sup>

One should speak only when spoken to, and then be brief, respectful and to the point. Rather than offering one's own opinion on the subject matter, the mureed should restrain his tongue and await the response of his murshid. The speech of one who is not in full control of himself is dangerous. It is filled with neglectfulness of God, self-regard and often such evils as ignorance, conceit, hurtfulness and hypocrisy. Rasulullah ﷺ has said, "*Of all the organs, the tongue will be punished most severely.*"<sup>180</sup> Allah has stated:

178 at-Tirmidhi, Ahmad

179 Faza'il-e-A'maal

180 Hilyat al-Auliya

"Oh ye who believe, do not say (to the Holy Prophet) 'look at us!' but rather 'cast your gaze upon us' and listen (to him). And for the unbelievers is a grievous penalty."<sup>181</sup>

There are many other rules that could be mentioned, but the guiding principle is this: BEHAVE AS THOUGH YOU ARE A SAHABA IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD'S MESSENGER ﷺ. Emulate their exterior behaviour in the hope that one might one day possess their interior state of intense love, devotion and reverence.

181 Sura al-Baqarah, v 104



## TA'AH - THE PRIORITY OF OBEDIENCE

*Through obedience to the shaykh, one perfects obedience to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. Obey the murshid in his commands and proscriptions, whether or not you understand them, for he is aware of the boundaries (hudud) of Allah and possessed of spiritual insight that unveils the hidden realities, especially of the states of one's heart.*

For those who yearn to strive along the spiritual path to God, who seek to develop their ihsan and inculcate taqwa into their hearts and lives, the shaykh is indispensable. However, for one who has entered into the fold of the Sufis, seeking guidance and protection from shaytaan beneath their cloaks, the way ahead must be marked by obedience. Making bay'ah, developing a bond of love and devotion with the peer, and spending time in his company is futile if one does not adhere to his teachings, follow his prescriptions and refrain from what he has forbidden. Rasulullah ﷺ has said, "Faith means sincerity of purpose and adherence ... to Allah, to His book, to His prophet, TO ONE'S CHIEFS AND LEADERS AMONG MUSLIMS, and to the common people."<sup>182</sup>

### THE EXAMPLE OF THE SAHABA

*"Oh ye who believe! Obey Allah, obey His Messenger, and those in authority amongst yourselves."*<sup>183</sup>

The lives of the sahaba are filled with instances of their instanc

<sup>182</sup> Muslim

<sup>183</sup> an-Nisa, (4:59)

and unquestioning obedience to the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Indeed many companions, notably Umar, saw questioning his orders as a sure sign of hypocrisy. Whether or not they understood, whether or not they agreed, his prescriptions and ordinances were carried out immediately, wholeheartedly and to the letter.

For example, the Arabs were famous drinkers; their love of beer and wine was legendary – in fact, the word 'alcohol' actually comes from the Arabic *al-khul*. However, when Rasulullah ﷺ declared that the curse of God and His Messenger ﷺ was upon intoxicants, so zealous were the sahaba in discarding their stores of alcohol, that wine ran through the streets of Madinah.<sup>184</sup> It is testimony to both the obedience of the sahaba and their faithfulness in spreading Allah's message, that Islam has remained the only movement (religious or otherwise) that has successfully abolished intoxicants.

Their unquestioning obedience, even in seemingly inconsequential matters, is typified by the example of Abdullah bin Rawaha. Once he heard the Prophet ﷺ say (to someone else entirely), "sit down," whereupon he immediately sat down in the middle of the road! Rasulullah ﷺ then passed by him and asked him, "what are you doing?" He replied: "I heard you say, 'sit,' so I sat!" The Prophet ﷺ replied, "may Allah increase you in obedience!"<sup>185</sup>

It was not only the men who manifested such extraordinary determination and submission. Ayesha once said,

"blessed be the women of the Ansar! When the verses of veiling were revealed, so eager were they to veil themselves that they actually tore up any cloth they could find, whether from garments or a curtain with pictures on it, and covered themselves. When they came to pray behind Rasulullah ﷺ, they seemed to have birds perched on their heads!"<sup>186</sup>

<sup>184</sup> al-Bukhari

<sup>185</sup> Musannaf of Abd ar-Razzaq

<sup>186</sup> al-Bukhari, the last sentence reported by Ibn Kathir from Ibn Abi Hatim



One should pause to reflect on this valuable lesson. When one calls to mind the sahaba, one thinks of the great jurists, scholars, warriors and saints among them. However, not all of them boasted the grasp of fiqh, hadith, tafsir and logic as had great companions like Umar, Ali, Abu Bakr, Ibn Abbas, Ayesha and others. One should never forget that the majority of them were ordinary men and women who were raised to the highest levels of spirituality only because of their association and obedience to Rasulullah ﷺ.

Once a Bedouin slave-girl from a tribe of stone-worshippers was brought to Rasulullah ﷺ, and he asked her, "where is Allah?" She replied, "He is in the sky." He smiled and said, "you are a believer." All scholars agree that Allah is not literally in the sky (far elevated is He above direction, place or time!).<sup>185</sup> Yet, although technically she was wrong, Rasulullah ﷺ accepted the answer as an indication of her belief. It is not knowledge that propels one along the path to God; it is love and obedience.

The tales of the Sufis are equally replete with examples of mureeds' unquestioning obedience to their shaykhs. Shibli, for example, was once made by his murshid to beg for an entire year, during which time he suffered torrents of abuse, mockery and derision. But he kept at it despite the urgings of his ego, and later said, "it was through this that I finally conquered my nafs."

Another mureed was ordered by his shaykh to deliver a parcel to a king. He left immediately, not even stopping to put on his shoes, and travelled the entire way barefoot. The ruler was so pleased with the gift that he sent a slave-girl in return. On the way, the two began to feel desire for each other. However, every time the mureed looked amorously at the slave-girl, he saw his shaykh! When he returned, his shaykh told him, "you have fulfilled your responsibility to me (to

187 Muslim, commentary by al-Nawawi and Qadi Iyad.

188 This is the position of the Ashari school of theology, to which the vast majority of the Ahl as-Sunnah belong. It is on points such as this that the bid'ah of Ibn Taymiyyah and the anthropomorphists (mujassama) was most apparent.

obey my orders); I have fulfilled mine towards you (to safeguard you from sin)."

Stories such as these could fill a book of many volumes. The conclusion one inevitably draws, however, is that it is through submission and obedience to the visible shaykh that one perfects submission and obedience to God and His Prophet ﷺ.

#### WHETHER YOU UNDERSTAND OR NOT!

The murshid does not guide except to good; whatever task, mujahadah or service to which he puts the mureed is an exercise carefully designed to deepen the latter's spirituality or purify him from his lower self. This seems quite an obvious statement to make, but one needs to bear in mind that the disciple is frequently unable to discern the hidden wisdom behind the shaykh's prescriptions. Often the mureed cannot imagine how following his commands will possibly lead to spiritual progress. The nafs will arise, asking that most dangerous of questions in the spiritual way: 'why?' (It was this question, and the pride that prompted it, that caused Iblis to be cast out of Heaven).

The reason for this is simple – the mureed does not have the benefit of the shaykh's spiritual eye, nor the insight and wisdom to know what is in his own best interests. The patient, incapable of knowing what his weaknesses and maladies are, will not be able to understand the master physician's prescriptions. The tasks to which the shaykh sets the mureed are aimed at correcting his particular faults. He may encourage one mureed to perform salat ad-duha, for example, but forbid another from doing so. He may give one particular *awrad* to read, but instruct another merely to stand at the door of his khanqah and take people's shoes. These seemingly unfathomable exercises are prescribed by the shaykh intentionally, with full foreknowledge of the benefit that will accrue to the mureed. It may be only many years later that the disciple will understand their wisdom, perhaps even never. Thus the mureed should not



question the shaykh's advice or orders, but rather follow them with complete faith.

There was an ignorant man who once attended a lecture about the benefits of 'bismillah', and was so impressed that he used to recite it constantly. Unfortunately, he forgot the pronunciation and instead used to say, 'sarbillah!' Years later, the same alim came to his village, and the man invited him for a meal. Along the way, however, they were thwarted by a flooded river. But the man took the scholar by the hand and, muttering under his breath, walked upon the surface of the water to the other side. The alim was astounded. "How did you do it?" he cried. The man replied, "simple! I have such faith in what you spoke about that day, that whatever I wish to accomplish, I merely recite 'sarbillah' and it gets done!"

#### FOLLOW ORDERS, NOT ACTIONS

Obedying the shaykh, carrying out his orders promptly and to the letter, is not necessarily the same as emulating his actions. At times, the peer will do something that is appropriate for his spiritual station and rank, but which would be extremely detrimental to the mureed's spiritual progress.

Rasulullah ﷺ once observed a continuous fast – that is, without breaking his fast for sehri or iftaar. Some of his companions tried to do the same, but after a few days, started to become weak with hunger. Rasulullah ﷺ said, "are you like me? I receive provision from the Unseen! Fast, and break your fast."<sup>189</sup>

There is a story told about a disciple who kissed a little girl on the head after observing his master doing the same. The shaykh said nothing, but later on, he approached a red-hot furnace and kissed that as well. Then he stood back and motioned for his mureed to copy him. Of course, the terrified mureed refused! The master then said, "*I kissed the child because I saw in her Allah's beauty (jamal). I kissed the furnace because I saw in it Allah's majesty (jalal). You do not*

*see what I see, so do what I say, not what I do!"*

#### AGAINST SHARI'AH?

Now we come to a difficult and delicate subject. Some of the spiritual elders have said that one should follow the murshid even if he advises that which seems to be against the shari'ah. Many people struggle on this point due to an understandable caution and dismay. After all, Rasulullah ﷺ has said, "*there is no obedience to any created being that involves disobedience to Allah.*"<sup>190</sup>

The truth is that the perfected shaykh, the representative of Allah and His Prophet ﷺ, will neither go against the shari'ah nor advise anyone else to do so either. However, THERE IS A FINE BUT DEFINITE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE SHARI'AH AND ONE'S OWN INTERPRETATION OF IT. Sometimes, that which one thinks to be against the Divine Law, in reality is not. This is a subtle point to grasp, so we will give examples from the Qur'an and Sunnah in order that it might become somewhat clearer.

We have mentioned before the quest of Sayyidina Musa to gain spiritual knowledge from al-Khidhr. During their travels, al-Khidhr outwardly taught Sayyidina Musa nothing at all. On the way, however, he sank a poor ferryman's boat (after using it to cross a river), killed an innocent boy, and performed manual labour for people who had just abused and ill-treated them. Each time the prophet protested – quite rightly – that the other's actions were completely against the law of God (shari'ah), until Khidhr had fulfilled his purpose and parted company with him.

Before he did, however, he explained why each of these seemingly wrong actions were justified FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HIS HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE. He had sunk the boat because there was a tyrant making his way down the river, seizing all watercraft for himself. The ferryman would thus be able to keep his damaged boat, and preserve his only livelihood by fixing it later. The boy that



al-Khidhr had killed would have grown up to be an unbeliever, and would have taken his righteous parents with him into disbelief; thus by killing him in the innocence of youth, the saint had actually saved his soul and his parents' honour! Finally, the work done for the cruel townspeople was performed in order to hide the inheritance of two orphans from them until they reached maturity.<sup>191</sup>

Clearly, the hidden knowledge that al-Khidhr possessed enabled him to do what was right, although at the time it seemed wrong. It is much the same with the shaykh. Often he will advise that which one might think is wrong, whereas in truth it is both appropriate for the mureed's level and within the framework of the shari'ah. The entire passage is clear proof of the hidden knowledge (*kashf*) of the auliya-allah, as well as the more common-place fact that one's idea of right and wrong can be deceiving, depending on one's spiritual insight.

Having said that, some important distinctions should be noted. al-Khidhr was, according to a number of ulama, a Prophet with his own shari'ah; thus as such, he was not breaking God's law, just going against the shari'ah revealed to Sayyidina Musa. No murshid or Sufi, no matter how great, has permission to contravene the final message of Rasulullah ﷺ. Additionally, Prophets are divinely protected from sin, whilst this does not apply to the auliya-Allah - they are human, and can err.<sup>192</sup>

Most of the ulama indicate, therefore, that there is a difference between those few things that are agreed-upon as being unconditionally haram and the great majority of matters which are situation specific. If a murshid flatly instructs the murid to directly perform the unconditionally haram, it is probably a clear indication that he is not a murshid after all! However, one needs to exercise extreme caution regarding that which - in ignorance - one 'decides'

191 al-Kahf, (18:65-82). It should be noted that this passage is not a commentary of the Qur'an, but a virtual word-for-word translation of the verses. It leaves little scope for differences of interpretation.

192 al-Ghunya, vol 5

contrary to shari'ah! This is where many zealous mureeds err, committing a slander against their murshids and a crime against themselves.

Shibli, for example, was made to beg for a year by his shaykh. Begging is makruh, because Allah desires us to earn our livelihood honestly and have some self-respect. Shibli, on the other hand, was ordered to beg precisely in order to destroy his pride and conceit, as a lesson about his (and humanity's) utter insignificance and worthlessness in front of God. Thus though begging is frowned upon because it lowers our self-esteem, it was exactly for this reason that it Shibli had to do it. His shaykh realised that he had reached a higher spiritual state, wherein further progress would not be possible without a lesson of this extreme nature.

The prescriptions of Rasulullah ﷺ are so universal and profound that they are incumbent upon all Muslims of any spiritual level; the prescriptions of the shaykh are limited to the circumstance, time and spiritual state of a particular mureed.

The reader might be surprised to know that there are many incidents recorded in the hadith wherein ignorant people such as ourselves might accuse the sahaba of overstepping the boundaries of shari'ah (we seek refuge from this). Some used to kneel before Rasulullah ﷺ, others used to kiss his feet and wished to prostrate before him<sup>193</sup>. Once, for example, Sayyidina Ali missed his salaa al-'asr because Rasulullah ﷺ was resting in his lap, and he could not bear to disturb him.<sup>194</sup> Sayyidina Umar refused to believe that the Holy Prophet ﷺ could be dead, and threatened to kill anyone that gainsaid him.<sup>195</sup> Rasulullah ﷺ even instructed another companion to break his prayer in order to perform a task for him.<sup>196</sup> The list goes

193 Umar, as reported in al-Bukhari

194 Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, (hasan sahih according to Ibn Hajar)

195 ash-Shifa (ghareeb hasan)

196 al-Bukhari, Muslim

197 Mishkaat



on and on – but suffice to say that if anyone but the sahaba were to do these things, they would immediately be accused of sinfulness, if not outright unbelief. It is because these actions were theirs, however, that they have now become enshrined as integral parts of Deen. If some of these examples shock us, it is merely because our knowledge of Islam is neither as deep nor as comprehensive as we think it to be. This is precisely the point – we should stop passing judgements on the legality of actions from a standpoint of ignorance.

The shaykh might perceive, for example, a particular danger of ostentation (riya) for a mureed performing salaah in congregation, and therefore command him to pray in privacy. Avoiding riya is wajib; prayer in congregation is sunna. Thus although this advice seems against the shari'ah, it is actually fully in consonance with it. One should beware, therefore, of doubt – it may be born out of pride and misunderstanding.

Once a shaykh gave his mureed some money and ordered him to spend the night in a brothel. The horrified disciple disobeyed twice, but the third time he reluctantly complied. When he got there, he found to his astonishment his own wife weeping in a corner! She just had been kidnapped and sold to the brothel. Had the mureed not obeyed his shaykh, his own wife's honour would have been violated. He used the money his shaykh had given him to free her and the couple were restored to each other.

The same adab (etiquette) pervades when the mureed appears to perceive a lapse in the shaykh himself with regards to the shari'ah. As mentioned, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between the auliya-allah and divinely-protected Prophets. Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani has an entire section regarding the adab of the mureed in regards to this delicate issue, and how to approach the subject whilst maintaining adab for the shaykh and for Allah. He advises the following course of action,

"If the shaykh does something that strikes him [the mureed] as

incompatible with the shari'ah; he must ask him about it obliquely. If he notices some kind of fault ... he must overlook it and turn the suspicion upon himself. He must try to interpret the shari'ah in the shaykh's favour... If he goes back to him later, he must firmly believe that this [lapse] is a thing of the past."<sup>198</sup>

Thus if one is unsure about something, he should respectfully ask the shaykh and await a response. If the shaykh remains silent, then hold to patience and carry out his orders anyway. It may be that you are not ready for the answer. A father cannot explain to his child the importance of school, for example, but that doesn't mean he will permit him to stay at home! Only when the child grows up, and not before, will he realise the wisdom of the parents. The secret benefits of obedience lie not in that which is easy for us, either mentally or physically, but in that which we find difficult. As Allah says,

*"It may be that there is great benefit in that which ye detest, and great harm in that which ye love. Allah knows, and you do not know."*<sup>199</sup>

<sup>198</sup> al-Ghunya, vol 5

<sup>199</sup> al-Baqarah, (2:216)



## SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

*"This trackless ocean is too vast for your comprehension;  
There are no paths for weary travellers.  
Take this old mariner, my son, lest you stray afar.  
I will guide you to the harbour that you seek..."*

The analogy of peeri-mureedi is that of a tree – *"a blessed tree, neither of the east nor of the west."* The seeds of this goodly tree are love (ishq) and yearning (shauq), planted in the fertile earth that is the heart of man. *"Its roots are firmly fixed"* – the manifold divisions of iman; its trunk is the shari'ah. Its branches – the ascending paths of tariqah – *"soar unto heaven."*

Its many-hued foliage are the leaves of ultimate reality (haqiqah); the sap of its bark is nur, which *"would shine in its radiance, though no fire hath touched it. Light upon light!"* When the tree of the spirit blossoms, the seeker becomes the sought; for *"Allah guides to His light whom He wishes"*.

Then will the shaykh *"bring forth fruit, by leave of his Lord"* – the wisdom of true knowledge (ma'rifah). The shaykh feeds this fruit to the mureed. He plants the seed of love within the breast of one whose heart – at the outset of his search – is *"like a stone, or even harder than that."*

He is patient in the winter of his mureed's soul, for he knows that one day his stone heart will *"split asunder, so that from it will flow (pure) water."*

And he is firm in his spring when the seeker awakens and *"like a seed, which sends forth its stalk,"* begins to grow in wisdom and purity. He guides him along the path, disciplining him so that he does not grow astray.

And when the soul *"strengthens, and grows firm upon its stalk,"*

## On the Need for a Spiritual Teacher

*delighting the sower and enraging the unbelievers" the shaykh watches and guides still, until the seeker's heart "crumbles, and prostrates in adoration of Allah."*

Oh Allah! Bless us with the company of your friends, whose joy and divinely appointed duty is to slowly and lovingly, with wisdom and patience, guide us along the long road to You. *"Oh our Lord, for with you lies the journey's end."*

The quotations are interpretations of excerpts from the following verses: Sura an-Nur, the verse of light; Sura Ibrahim, the verse of the goodly tree; Sura al-Fath, the verse of Muhammad; Sura al-Baqarah, the verse of the rock.



## APPENDIX A - TASAWWUF IN CIVILIZATION

One should note the effects that the unified development of shari'ah and tasawwuf, the external and internal Sunnah, has had upon the history of Islamic civilization. The mutual understanding between the teachers of law (the fuqaha) and the guardians of ethics (the Sufi masters)<sup>200</sup> brings about balance and harmony in the body corpus of Islam. Body and soul, enemies to each other no longer, are united in the common quest for the vision of Allah. Viewed through this prism of clear sight, all human activity becomes an act of worship, rather than a hindrance from it. The mundane world is sanctified.

Thus made whole, purified of interior conflict, Islam truly was the noblest and greatest civilizing force that the world had ever seen. Glancing in the light of material genius and spiritual splendor, it reached heights never previously attained by any civilization or culture in the history of mankind. The number of acknowledged saints produced by Islam – the world's youngest religion – has been estimated as being greater than all other religions combined. Islam harmonized the secular and the sacred, action and intention, body and soul. The principles of tasawwuf – perfection and beauty – manifested themselves in every facet of human life. Shaykh Murad says,

“ The superb human quality of the Companions is one of the most moving and astounding of the Blessed Prophet's miracles. Receiving alone the burden of revelation, and bearing virtually alone the responsibilities of family and state, he maintained such sanctity, humour, and moral seriousness that his world was transformed around him. The political unification of Arabia, itself an unprec-

200 Most fully realized in Imam Ghazzali's unsurpassed magnum opus 'Ihya'



edented achievement, was only made possible by the existence of a spiritual principle at its centre, which melted hearts, and made a new world possible.

"The Companions, as the most perfect exemplars of the Islamic principle of seeing with both eyes, were, as the saying goes: 'cavalrymen by day, and monks by night.' They united zahir and batin, body and spirit, in a way that was to their pagan and Christian contemporaries extraordinary, and which, in our day, when balance of any sort is rare, is hard even to imagine. Their faces radiated with the inner calm that comes of inner peace: 'IT IS BY THE REMEMBRANCE OF ALLAH THAT HEARTS FIND PEACE.'"<sup>201</sup>

This dedicated pursuit of excellence, beauty and perfection (ihsan) touched every aspect of human life, raising it from the ordinary to the level of divine worship. Its effects can be seen even in areas not usually associated with religion, two examples being warfare and art.

## HOLY WARRIORS

*'la mujahid illa Ali, la sayf illa dhul-fiqar – there is no holy warrior if not Ali, and there is no sword if not that of the Prophet ﷺ.'*

The brutality of war and the savage hatred of the battlefield is the last place one would think to look for saints and holiness. Throughout history, it has been the cause of catastrophic human suffering and pain. Nevertheless, both Qur'an and hadith speak at great length about the tremendous status of a holy warrior. Often some Muslims wonder how any cause of such suffering could possibly be regarded as an act of worship. Without going into the

numerous shari'ah stipulations for jihad<sup>202</sup>, the answer lies not in the physical act, but in the spiritual orientation and intention of the soldier.

The sacredness of warfare is explained in many ahadith as being not in the external combat, but the internal struggle on the battlefield of the warrior's own soul. "Many of the martyrs of my community will die in their beds," said Rasulullah ﷺ, "and many are those who die on the battlefield whose intention is known only to Allah."<sup>203</sup> The mujahid is a warrior who can defeat his own self, for the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said, "the (true) mujahid is one who strives against himself for the sake of obeying Allah."<sup>204</sup>

Thus, he is one who controls his anger, bloodlust, hatred and thirst for revenge even in the heat of battle. His internal state is peaceful and filled with remembrance of Allah, and warfare itself becomes worship-filled. He realises – with a knowledge born of certainty – that it is Allah, not he or his army, who will cause victory; and that even this situation is nothing but another path that his Lord has provided for him to demonstrate his faithfulness and devotion.

The greatest exemplar of this lofty state is, of course, the noble Sayyidina Ali. The warrior-prince of the Muslims once did battle with a Jewish soldier. Overpowered and helpless, the defiant man spat in his face; whereupon Ali, instead of killing him, left him alone. When asked why by the astounded Jew (who subsequently converted), he replied, "before, I was going to kill you for the sake of Allah and His Prophet. When you spat at me, though, I became angry. To kill for the sake of my anger – even an enemy in the heat of battle – is to disobey Allah and obey my nafs. This is not the objective of jihad,

202 The detailed rules of jihad – such as no taking of innocent life, no unnecessary destruction of property, and good treatment of prisoners – both antedate by 1400 years and are more comprehensive than modern International Law.

203 Ahmad

204 at-Tirmidhi, Ahmad, Sahih Ibn Hibban. Rasulullah ﷺ has also warned, "your greatest enemy is between your flanks (your nafs)." (Bayhaqi – a weak hadith, but its meaning has been confirmed by many scholars).

201 'Seeing with both Eyes' – a lecture given in Cardiff, UK



*therefore it is not permissible for me take your life.*"<sup>205</sup> Another version of this story has him saying, *"my enemy is not you, but the unbelief within your heart. This battle is of light against darkness, and darkness (of anger) cannot overcome darkness (of unbelief)."*

The conduct of this great sahaba, warrior and saint together, is a shining example to all mankind regardless of station or circumstance. Often quoted, it is regrettably far less often acted upon. It has influenced forever perceptions of chivalry and righteous conduct on the battlefield. Echoes of his saintly personality can be traced in cultural settings far removed from seventh century Arabia, from the legends of King Arthur to the Jedi Knights of Star Wars.<sup>206</sup>

The greatest impact, however, was upon Muslims themselves. He has been the inspiration for whole generations of holy warriors, from the sahaba through Salah ad-Deen al-Ayyubi,<sup>207</sup> right up to the colonial-era freedom fighters such as the Naqshbandi shaykh Imam Shamil al-Dagestani and the Shadhili Darqawi shaykh Emir Abdul Qadir of Algeria. It set such a lofty standard of conduct that those who followed it faithfully have been saved from the dreadful acts of cruelty and depravity so commonly seen in war.

This effect is most clearly visible in the sufi warrior-tariqahs of North Africa. The legendary military orders of futuwah (knighthood) were organised around ribats (way-stations) that served as both military and spiritual training centres. Disciples were trained in martial arts and purification of the heart, and became renowned both for their military prowess and their honourable

205 Hikayat as-Sahaba and other historical and biographical works.

206 Intriguingly, strong parallels have been drawn between the conduct, beliefs and even the dress of the Jedi Knights of Star Wars mythology and the historical warrior-Sufi tariqahs of futuwah. The word 'jedi' is actually derived from the title of the brown-cloaked master of the order - 'jaddi'. See the article in 'the Muslim Magazine' for more details.

207 Known as Saladin, the Reconqueror of Jerusalem, he was a sultan and commander whose martial prowess, saintliness and magnanimity in victory was legendary even among the rabidly anti-Muslim Christian chroniclers of the Crusades.

conduct on and off the battlefield. Through Spanish storytellers, word of their deeds spread through medieval Europe and the concept of the chivalric code of knighthood was born. Their motto, given above, clearly states their inspiration and objective: not only victory, but the perfection of the soul through inner and outer jihad. In the defence of Islamic lands against their enemies, and the defence of the heart against its inner enemy, was to be found the ultimate reward of Allah's good pleasure.

#### SUFI ART AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

*"For the contemplative man a lesson can be learned from everything."*  
(Sufyan al-Thawri)

The marble symmetry of the Taj Mahal, glowing pink at sunset, the towering majesty of the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, the beauty of Islamic calligraphy and the dizzyingly mathematical precision of its artwork, as found as far west as Spain and as far east as Indonesia - for a religion as dry, legalistic and cold as Islam is supposed by observers to be, Muslims have produced some of the most inspiring artistry ever known. It is tragic that some modern-day Muslims are conflicted when confronted with the soaring beauty of Islamic art - unsure as to whether it is bid'ah even as wonder and awe fill their hearts. This is in dramatic contrast to western art critics who, their energy and creativity exhausted, have proclaimed 'the death of art', but nevertheless have enthused about Islamic art,

*"These must be the greatest artworks of all time. They are not inspired by the subconscious, irrational images of an individual, but an expression of a law manifesting - as directly as possible - unity in multiplicity [tauhid]."*<sup>208</sup>

In order to understand the essence of Islamic art it is first necessary to realize that it is not based on western art, which is

208 Sir Gai Eaton



concerned with the representation of nature. Rather it is the method of endowing all objects – a building, a water-fountain, a drinking vessel, a garment, or a carpet – with the perfection each object can possess according to its own nature. Islamic art does not add something alien to the objects that it shapes; it merely brings out their essential qualities.

In traditional Islamic art, beauty and use go hand in hand; they are inseparable aspects of perfection, as envisaged by the Prophetic tradition, “*Allah has prescribed perfection in all things*.”<sup>209</sup> It is connected to the concept of *ihsan* as set forth in the hadith of Gibrā’il, which includes the ideas of truth, beauty and perfection. More exactly it means inward beauty, beauty of the soul, which necessarily emanates outwards, transforming every human activity into an art and every art into the remembrance of God.

If we consider inward and outward beauty, we find the latter has its origin in the former. When human activities are integrated into Islam, they become a support for beauty – a beauty which in fact transcends these activities because it is the beauty of Islam itself. This is particularly true of the fine arts, as it is their role to manifest the hidden qualities of things. The art of Islam receives its beauty not from any ethnic genius but from Islam itself and just as Islamic science has its roots in the Qur’an and hadith, so the typical forms of Islamic art are rooted in the spirit of Islam.<sup>210</sup> It is no coincidence that, despite the prodigious quantity and superlative quality of Islamic art, very few of the artists themselves are remembered today. True *ihsan* entails self-effacement, not self-aggrandizement.

Just like the warrior-tariqahs, the Islamic guilds which presided over the production of these works were training grounds not only for technique, but for spiritual excellence, taking as their motto the hadith: “*Allah is beautiful, and He loves beauty*.”<sup>211</sup> Guild masters

would train their apprentices for years in religious practices as well as in the mechanics of crafting carpets, lamps or ceramics. Every guild was part of a Sufi tariqah; manual work was hence turned into a method of *dhikr*; every instant at the potter’s wheel, or the rug-maker’s frame, would be occupied with the mention of God and His Prophet ﷺ. It was above all a contemplative art, which aimed to express an encounter with the Divine Presence. The work was designed to be a mirror of Allah’s attributes; the artist, consciously performing an act of *ibaadah*. The production of beauty was seen as evidence of the craftsman’s inner repose and detachment; faults were the consequence of faults in the soul.<sup>212</sup>

On the other hand, our modern lack of recognition of beauty as the traditional accompaniment to the Muslim life indicates the absence of beauty in our souls. We have ceased to see this world as a mirror of Allah’s attributes; we no longer “*contemplate Him through His creation*.”<sup>213</sup> Instead of elevating and sacralizing the world through the remembrance of Allah, we dismiss its worth out of hand, unable to conceive of it as a means to worship. We regard it as evil – profane in the most literal sense of the word – but yet cannot do without it.

Out of necessity, therefore, and the innate inclinations of the soul, we partake of a world that we consider to be anti-God. This breeds hypocrisy and a distance from our Maker, which in turn has ensued from the decline of traditional Islam and its reliance upon *tasawwuf*, as well as from the spread of heresy and disharmony. Yet Rasulullah ﷺ has said, “*this world and everything in it is cursed, except for dhikr and what attends it...*”<sup>214</sup> Contrary to appearances, this is not a negative, but a positive statement, for Allah has said:

*‘Everything in the heavens and on earth does glorify His*

209 Muslim

210 Taken from ‘The Mirror of the Intellect’ by T Burckhardt.

211 Muslim

212 Excerpts from Kerim Fenari’s article, ‘the Wahhabi who Loved Beauty.’

213 al-Bukhari

214 at-Tirmidhi (hasan)



*transcendent beauty.*<sup>215</sup>

It is only through the remembrance of Allah that this world may be sanctified. If, as the masters of tasawwuf teach, dhikr accompanies every aspect of one's life, everything in it will become sacred.

#### BAQA BILLAH – ENDURING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

*"Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of Allah."*<sup>216</sup>

When the early Sufi masters heard the bawdy drinking songs of the Umayyad royalty, they discerned images of deepest spirituality. References to wine were taken as metaphors of divine love; drunkenness, the state of spiritual ecstasy. The inn-keeper was variously interpreted as the shaykh or Allah himself, the cup-bearer became the Holy Prophet ﷺ, freely granting draughts of wisdom and intercession from his Fountain of Abundance (*Haudh al-Kauthar*). It was testimony to the level of their divine contemplation that they found deep mystical truths hidden in the most coarse materialism.

Scanning the work of great Sufi luminaries, one discovers gems of wisdom and spiritual insight hidden in the most ordinary acts of life. Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani writes about spiritual charity, the levels of abstinence in fasting, and the pilgrimage of the heart to the Lord of the Ka'ba.<sup>217</sup> Imam Ghazali delves deeply into the inner realities of both worship and social transactions - exploring for example the mysteries of friendship and the bond of brotherhood.<sup>218</sup> Ibn Arabi's piercing dissection of the psychology of marriage, as an allegory of mankind's ultimate relationship with his Creator, is

215 al-Hashr (59:18)

216 Sura al-Baqarah, v 115

217 Sirr al-Asrar

218 Ihya Ulum ad-Deen

astounding in the breadth of its mystical conclusions.<sup>219</sup> Elsewhere, one may come across Imam Jafar as-Sadiq drawing profound spiritual insights about the fleeting illusions of worldly life from, of all things, the act of going to the toilet!<sup>220</sup>

One of the greatest and most awe-inspiring examples of divine contemplation through the prism of the physical world, however, surely must be that unsurpassed epic of poetry, the Mathnavi. Maulana Rumi's tremendous mystical outpouring was dictated spontaneously in rhymed Persian verse to his scribe Husam ad-Din as he wandered the gardens and streets of Konya. Rumi relates every conceivable worldly act or happening to man's association with Allah – a hammer hitting an anvil, the meeting of a frog and a mouse beside a sunlit pool, the fragrance of a rosebush that he walks past, the haunting music of a reed-flute, a mother scolding her child, even sexual indiscretions. Nothing is too base, nothing too profane, to be raised by the great Sufi master to an act of absolute communion; everything he sees or hears about appears to him a wondrous analogy of mortal affiliation with the Sublime Lord.

Yet these astonishing insights are not merely flights of fancy or the vanity of the Sufis. They are merely taking what was already present in Islam to its logical conclusion. It was the legal ordinances of the shari'ah, not the ecstatic mysticism of tasawwuf, that made the mundane sacred, by equating it with worship. The sanctification of every detail of life is to be found in the textbooks of the jurists. Fairness in trade was a blessed deed, lawful relations with one's spouse an act of worship. Sitting together and eating invoked Allah's pleasure; to deprive another by charging usury was to declare war against the Almighty. Above all, devout imitation of the minutiae of the Holy Prophet's ﷺ dress, habits and preferences was no less than obedience of Allah. Through the shari'ah, everyday actions became sacred; work, rest and play became worship.

219 Futuhat al-Makkiyyah, cited in 'The Tao of Islam.'

220 The Lantern of the Path



The Sufis, perfect practitioners of the highest realities of shari'ah, merely internalized these outward acts of worship. In their sincerity and zeal to worship Allah faithfully in every action and silence, they sought the hidden meanings in the most mundane and everyday acts. The great triumph of the Sufis has been to fuse external worship with internal contemplation. This, then, is the reality of the state of *baqa billah* – to live in the enduring presence of God. It is to find infinity in the ordinary.

### THE WAY FORWARD

The sections above contain merely examples of the total infusion of tasawwuf into every facet of traditional Islamic life. Through their teaching of ihsan – perfection and beauty in all fields of human endeavor – within the framework of shari'ah, the Sufis ennobled mankind. Conversely, much of the decline of Islamic beauty and influence can be attributed to our failure to recognize the essential role that tasawwuf and tariqah plays in the daily lives of Muslims. In exactly the same way, much of the criticism heaped upon Islam by outsiders – that it is a religion of law but not love, that it is superficial and without depth, and worst of all, that it is hypocritical and devoid of a spiritual centre – can be referred back to the same problem.

It is an unfortunate fact that modern Islamic education, from the earliest levels, devotes itself to teaching law (fiqh) but not ethics (akhlaq). Because the essential teachings of the Sufi masters have been ignored, all that remains are the fiqh manuals, which have been explicitly designed to teach only the external aspects of Islam. The teaching of Islam, right from childhood, has thus become centred around the points and niceties of jurisprudence. However, the qualities that form the logical basis of all fiqh have been deemed unimportant! It is as sad as it is ironic that we beautify the branches, but ignore the roots that sustain them. The inevitable result is that the tree of our faith is weak, hollow and decayed.

Thankfully, the ummah is still filled with Sufi masters, who ennoble and purify Muslims through the prism of their disciples' very own lives and works. Amid no other community may one find such glories of spirituality and human excellence in the most ordinary aspects of life. There is all the more reason to defend tradition against this new plague, which impoverishes Islam at precisely the moment in history when the West, exhausted by its own lack of spirituality, could begin to see it as a welcome and necessary alternative.

"The Sunnah itself is today a contested concept. A materialistic world necessarily influences the forms of religion which grow within it; and some Muslims today adopt forms of Islam that define the Sunnah in a one-eyed way ... they mutilate the Sunnah by minimising or even negating its inward dimensions. Any following of the externals of religion which is not made profound, compassionate and wise by an active and transformative spiritual life, will be a mere husk without a kernel: abrasive, hostile, self-righteous, lashing out at the innocent, and thriving on schism and controversy."<sup>221</sup>

Wisdom consists in recognising and establishing the correct balance between the two great principles of existence: the outward form (zahir), and the inward meaning (batin). Shari'ah without tariqah – Islam without tasawwuf – becomes a shadow of its own glory, a law like any other. The very thing that makes it divine law is the fact that it is infused with the beautiful attributes of God. If we take no steps to infuse our personalities with these same qualities, how can we sincerely profess to be following Islam? Allah has said,

"Oh ye who believe, enter into Islam wholeheartedly..."<sup>222</sup>

<sup>221</sup> Abd al-Hakim Murad, 'Seeing with Both Eyes.' He also speaks about those who attempt to practice tariqah but ignore shari'ah, with opposite but yet similar results.

<sup>222</sup> al-Baqarah, (2:208)



The commonly-heard slogan, 'Islam is not just a religion, but a way of life', can only truly be realized if both the principles of tasawwuf and the guidelines of shari'ah are implemented in every aspect of human life. Those who seek to deny the impact and centrality of tasawwuf will not find masaa'il on the conduct of the human heart in the manuals of fiqh. As shari'ah is concerned with action, so too tasawwuf is concerned with intention. It is in the unification of Iman, Ihsan and Islam – in every human endeavor – that the way forward should be sought. May Allah guide us all to His truth, guidance and mercy. He – glory be to Him – has said,

*"Verily, we do not change the condition of a people until they change that which is within their souls."*<sup>223</sup>

<sup>223</sup> ar-Ra'd, (13:11)

## APPENDIX B - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### IS PEERI-MUREEDI A BID'AH?

The most commonly encountered objection to peeri-mureedi is that it is a bid'ah – by which is meant: something that was not existent at the time of Rasulullah ﷺ and the three first generations of his successors (the salaf as-salihin). This erroneous statement is usually made due to lack of knowledge or a misunderstanding of the life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Hopefully any doubts about peeri-mureedi being the Sunnah not only of Rasulullah ﷺ, but of all the previous Prophets, have already been dispelled. It should be quite clear from the preceding discussion that THE TOTALITY OF PEERI-MUREEDI, AS WELL AS EVERY COMPONENT PART (BAY'AH, DISCIPLESHIP, PURIFICATION AND SO ON), IS SUNNAH, rigorously authenticated from the practice and example of our righteous ancestors.

It might be argued, however, that the rather informal peeri-mureedi of the sahaba was very different from the highly structured system of Sufi orders that have been in place for the last eight hundred years. It is readily acknowledged that concepts such as khanqahs, spiritual genealogies (*shajarat*) and other formal structures were not present (in their contemporary form) in the First Days. However, the same can be said about virtually the whole of Islam. The sahaba of Madinah knew nothing of hadith collections such as Imam Bukhari's al-Jami as-sahih, or of madhabs. Madressahs, libraries, and the formal curricula of Dar al-Ulums simply did not exist in their time. Nevertheless, they have been considered pre-requisites to learning for over a thousand years. This is because they were instituted as a response to certain dilemmas that sahaba never had to deal with.

As Islam spread, matured and blossomed from the simple faith



of desert Arabs into a religion of Empires, it encountered the same Greek and Persian influences that had corrupted Christianity and Judaism before it. In addition, problems such as forgery of hadith and major misinterpretation of the Qur'an threatened to destroy the very basis of Islam itself. The great mujaddid scholars responded to these internal and external influences by systematizing their faith. From the verdicts of Rasulullah ﷺ and his companions were derived the schools of fiqh; from their statements of faith, the Imams al-Maturidi and al-Ash'ari identified the fine theological points of Islamic doctrine. So too from the piety and mystical observances of Rasulullah ﷺ and his sahaba, the principles of tasawwuf were derived, and formalized into systems of self-purification and holiness. In effect, all of the above is indeed bid'ah.

#### A FEW WORDS ON BID'AH

However, perhaps something should be said about bid'ah itself, in order to clear up the controversy and confusion that surround the term. Most people are aware of the hadith in which Rasulullah ﷺ declared, "*beware of matters newly begun (muhdathat), for every muhdathat is an innovation (bid'ah), and every bid'ah is a misguidance.*"<sup>224</sup> This hadith is often taken literally, and the inference is drawn that absolutely anything and everything that has evolved after the time of Rasulullah ﷺ is an evil misguidance. Unfortunately, this would imply that motor vehicles, air-conditioning, modern medicine and even the clothes that we wear, are all haraam. After all, Rasulullah ﷺ has clearly stated in the above hadith that EVERY new thing is bid'ah.

However, another hadith states: "*whoever institutes a good practice in the deen (sanna sunnatan hasana) will be rewarded for it*

224 Muslim. Some narrations add, 'and every misguidance is in the fire,' although some prominent scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyyah in Minhaj al-Usul and the contemporary muhaddith Shaykh Abd al-Fatah Abu Ghuddah, are of the opinion that this is a fabrication. And Allah knows best.

and for everyone who practices it." <sup>225</sup> This 'good act' would also qualify as an innovation (bid'ah); thus we now have two equally authentic, but seemingly contradictory statements. This seemingly impassable predicament is, however, easily resolved by reference to the laws of jurisprudence (usul al-fiqh). It is a good example of *takhsis al-amm*<sup>226</sup> - the principle by which a general statement is restricted so that it does not contradict another necessary principle.

Accordingly, the great muhadditheen have achieved reconciliation by stating that the latter hadith actually explains and restricts the former. This also serves as an object lesson as to exactly why one needs to follow one of the schools of thought, and not attempt to extrapolate Islamic law from one's own (flawed) interpretation of Qur'an and Sunnah.

Shah Abd al-Haq Dehlawi, the great muhaddith, has stated:

"(the meaning of the hadith is that) ... whoever invents an opinion in Deen which is not from Deen (ie: that opposes or changes it) is rejected."<sup>227</sup>

Imam Shafi'i stated,

"there are two kinds of introduced matters (*muhdathat*) - one which contradicts the Qur'an, Sunnah, or 'Ijma, and this is a misguided innovation; and the second kind which entails no contradiction of these authorities, and this is a non-reprehensible innovation."<sup>228</sup>

The definition of *bid'ah ad-dalalah* (a misguided innovation) is thus: anything that has neither explicit *nor implicit* basis in the shari'ah. Most ulama followed the more nuanced classification of the mujtahid Shafi'i Imam al-Izz bin Abd al-Salam, who

225 Muslim

226 An established principle of Usul al-Fiqh. See Reliance of the Traveller.

227 Ashi'atul Lam'aat (the commentary of Mishkaat)

228 Tabyin Kadhif al-Muftari, by Ibn Asakir - I have paraphrased to make the quotation more concise. Also in Manaqib ash-Shafi'i and the Hilyah.



divided bid'ah as follows: WAJIB (obligatory innovations, such as the compilation of the Qur'an or the science of hadith criticism), MUSTAHAB (recommended, such as the creation of schools), JA'IZ (permitted, like the construction of tarred roads or central heating), MAKHRUH (disliked, such as the over-decoration of masajid) and HARAM (forbidden, like the introduction of sectarian beliefs).<sup>229</sup>

The above definition of bid'ah is accepted by virtually all the classical scholars as the exposition of orthodox Islam. The only notable exceptions have been Ibn Hazm, Ibn Taymiyyah and more recently the Wahhabi movement of Saudi Arabia. It is hoped that this short explanation will help to clear up this frequently misunderstood issue in the light of the opinions of the great scholars of Islam. For further information, Shaykh Gibril Haddad's work 'Sunna Notes Vol 2, or Shaykh Nuh Keller's discussion of bid'ah in 'Reliance of the Traveller' are highly recommended.

#### WHY DO THE SUFIS USE DIFFERENT METHODS?

Another question that is often asked is why different salaasul (spiritual orders) use different methods in order to achieve their goals. Some place an emphasis on silent dhikr, for example, whilst others make use of sama (the spiritual concert). Even within a single silsilah, different masters will favour different – occasionally conflicting – methods for the reformation of their disciples. Very seldom will a mureed have the same combination of *awrad* (readings) as another. The most famous of all these idiosyncrasies is undoubtedly 'the Dance of the Whirling Dervishes' used by the Maulawi order of Turkey.

This has been the cause of much unnecessary confusion. Ignorant disciples of different shaykhs have been known to argue about the superiority of their shaykh's methods, some have even been known to insult or deride other masters' techniques. Who then can blame the outsider who questions how so many paths can lead

to the same place? Three misconceptions need to be corrected. The most obvious (and therefore the most rarely mentioned) is THAT WHICH UNITES IS GREATER THAN THAT WHICH SEPARATES. Small but very noticeable differences tend to be highlighted, and these obscure the major similarities in the techniques of every Sufi order. For a start, all Sufis enjoin the injunctions of Islam (the five pillars and duties towards mankind) as their beginning point. They all also use techniques designed to bring about *islah* (self-reformation), such as *dhikr* and *muraqaba* (contemplation).

The second misconception is to think that these things actually are differences! All the diverse methods mentioned above are merely variant forms of the same thing: *dhikr* – the remembrance of God. They have simply been modified to suit the lifestyle, inclination and culture of the hundreds of millions of Muslims who are not first century Arabs of the Hijaz Peninsula.

Finally, if one carefully contemplates the purpose of tasawwuf – the purification of the soul from its maladies – one realises that to ask why the Sufis use different methods is as nonsensical as questioning a physician's prescription of different medication to different patients. A tablet may look like any other, distinguishable only by colour and shape. It is the doctor who understands the specific properties of each one, and thus is able to treat different ailments and different patients appropriately. It is precisely the same with diverse wazaaf; they are prescribed by the Sufi shaykh in order to purify a particular person of a particular spiritual disease. This is in accordance with the practice of Rasulullah ﷺ himself, who advised certain forms of *dhikr*, *dua* or *ayahs* to combat certain physical and spiritual maladies.

#### IS DHIKR MORE IMPORTANT THAN PRAYER?

One of the stranger complaints aired is that Sufis encourage their followers to view 'non-fardh' practices such as *dhikr* gatherings, *khatme khwaajegan* and *mawlid* celebrations as more important

229 al-Jawaahir fi sharh al-Arba'in an-Nawawiyya, by al-Jurdani



than fardh duties like prayer. One can only assume that this misconception is as a result of that minority of mureeds who are neglectful of their faraidh but yet loudly boast of their attendance at such programs. No true Sufi will ever encourage his disciples to think in such a manner. One must, however, bear in mind that a shaykh's mureeds are not themselves auliya. They are drawn from every spiritual station – from outright sinners to the most pious, and the entire spectrum in between. If they falter or have failings, it is hardly an aspersion on the shaykh – that is exactly the reason that they have attached themselves to him! As one of the mashaykh mentioned in an Arabic pun, '*al-murid marid, fa al-shaykh tabib!*' (the murid is sick; the shaykh is the healer).

'Enjoyable' activities such as dhikr mehfil, poetry recitals and 'urs celebrations are designed to attract the one who is straying back into the fold of Islam. It is through these methods that the Sufis, slowly and patiently, encourage the sinner to leave aside his evil ways and awaken in his heart a love for Rasulullah ﷺ and his Sunnah. As Sayyidina Ali wisely advised, "*talk to people according to their level, else you will drive them away.*" The same technique has been adopted by movements such as the Tablighi Jamaat, who successfully employ non-fardh and innovative methods such as gasht, ta'leem after salaah and ijtima gatherings to inculcate adherence to the Sunnah.

#### ARE THE SUFIS MENTIONED IN THE QUR'AN?

Several times in the preceding discussion we have referred to ahadith in which Rasulullah ﷺ has mentioned the 'ulama'. The discerning reader will note that these have been taken as references to the Sufis. This may be the cause of some confusion. It is true that neither the Qur'an, nor Rasulullah ﷺ, nor any of the sahaba ever used the term 'Sufi'. This is because the word did not exist in their time. As al-Hujwiri has stated, "*in previous eras, Sufism was a reality*

without a name..."<sup>230</sup> The origin of the words tasawwuf and Sufi have been the cause of much debate throughout the centuries, and the opinions of the learned concerning it would be sufficient to fill a treatise.

An adequate and concise definition of a Sufi, according to the hadith of Qurb an-Nawafil, is ONE WHO LOVES ALLAH, AND WHOM ALLAH LOVES. The Sufis are given many titles in the Qur'an, among them being *muttaqin* (those who fear Allah), *muhsinin* (the doers of good), *saabirin* (the patient ones), *ibad ar-Rahman* (servants of the Most Merciful), and *ulul albaab* (the possessors of wisdom). There are over fifteen separate honorifics mentioned in the Qur'an that specify the qualities and attributes of the Sufi saints. One of those attributes is knowledge.

Just as the Sufi is not mentioned by name, neither is the *faqih* (jurist), the *muhaddith* (hadith master), the *mutakallim* (theologian), the *mufasssir* (Qur'anic commentator), or any of the other branches of learned scholars. All of the above are referred to in Qur'an and hadith by one title: 'alim. The arabic adjective means 'knowledge, cognisance, perception and learning.'<sup>231</sup> In the Arabic language it denotes not only religious learning, but secular knowledge as well. It is interesting that although, to many Muslims, the word ulema signifies scholars of religion, in Arab countries such as Libya, this word actually is used for scientists.

The definition of an alim according to the shari'ah is somewhat more restricted: that is, one imbued with knowledge – not only of the masaa'il of deen, but also of God's unity and of His signs in heaven and earth. There are those who have ilm ad-deen, conventional knowledge of religion, as referred to in the ayah, "*if you do not know, then ask the people of the Remembrance.*"<sup>232</sup> On the other hand, there

230 Kashf al-Mahjub

231 Hans Wehr Dictionary Of Modern Written Arabic

232 an-Nahl, (16:43) (in this instance the dhikr refers to knowledge of the Qur'an).



are those who have ilm al-yaqeen<sup>233</sup> (the knowledge of certainty, or absolute reality). They are those who worship Allah as though seeing Him (ihsan), who testify to Allah's Oneness (wahdaniyyat) not by virtue of intellect or report, but by their direct witnessing of Him (mushahadah). They are referred to in the ayat: *"There is no god but He – that is the testimony of Allah, His angels, and those whose knowledge is firmly grounded in justice..."*<sup>234</sup>

Thus the Sufis are indeed spoken of at length in the Qur'an; they are those who embody all the qualities Allah has told us that He loves. As Allah says,

*"Verily, amongst all Allah's servants, it is only the ulama who truly fear Him."*<sup>235</sup>

#### SCHOLARS AND SUFIS

A question often asked is regarding the exact difference between scholars and Sufis. It has in part been answered in the preceding section – that is, that there are different types or specialties of knowledge that are mentioned in Qur'an and hadith under the one category of 'ilm. Another way of asking the question is as follows: why can the conventional ulema, the learned doctors of religious sciences, not fulfill the roles of the Sufis? Why can one not turn to them for purification of the heart and for spiritual guidance?

As discussed at length in previous chapters, the answer to that question is merely this: their roles, duties and spheres of influence are different. As mentioned earlier, our righteous ancestors continued the various facets of the Prophetic mission (teaching, purifying and rehearsing God's signs). But at the same time they, in their wisdom, realized the importance of systematizing and formalizing the

<sup>233</sup> at-Takathur, (103:5)

<sup>234</sup> Aale Imran, (3:18)

<sup>235</sup> al-Fatir (35:28). al-Izz bin Abd as-Salam states, 'He means those who know Him, His attributes and actions; not those who know only his rulings.'

knowledge of Prophethood. This in turn necessitated a specialization of the roles and functions of those who transmitted it.

Even amongst the sahaba themselves, this partitioning can be seen. Abu Hurayrah restricted himself to teaching and narrating ahadith, not giving any fatawa. Umar was a judge and ruler, but he referred many legal decisions to Ali. Ibn Abbas was recognized as the primary interpreter of the Qur'an; Abu Dharr was a wandering ascetic and spiritual teacher who renounced worldly ties and even remonstrated the khulafah themselves. Ayesha was another great teacher and narrator, but her revered father, Abu Bakr, reported relatively few ahadith, concentrating rather on the stern duties of leadership.

In the same way, to the scholars of shari'ah fell the noble and vital duty of propagating and establishing the divine law. They were charged with the task of instructing the people in the laws of God, which involved defining the concept of good and evil deeds and the boundaries of belief. They were designated as the custodians of Islam and of the technical aspects of Iman (aqidah or doctrinal belief). History bears ample witness to their faithfulness in fulfilling this role, in the form of the remarkable historical authenticity of Islam. No other religion can claim to be as perfect a copy of its founder's precepts as can God's final message to mankind.

To the masters of tasawwuf, on the other hand, was given the responsibility of nurturing the Iman (faith and trust in God) and Ihsan of the Muslims. As the ulema were the firm roots of deen in a world of uncertainty and constant change, so the Sufis became its branches, overspreading both the east and the west. Through their nurturing guidance and patient purification of humanity's inner vices, men were given wings that they might fly unto God. If the ulema became the custodians of the body corpus of Islam, the Sufis were the guardians of its very soul.

It is appropriate at this point to comment on the views of al-Izz bin Abd as-Salam on the superiority of the Sufis over the scholars of



external knowledge taken from his Fatawa al-Izz bin Abd as-Salam.<sup>236</sup>

"No reasonable person doubts that the knowers of Allah [the Sufis] ...are not only better than the knowers of Allah's rulings [the ulema], but also better than those of the branches and roots of religion [the mujtahids], because the rank of a science is according to its object. [ie: the object of the Sufis' knowledge is Allah, whereas that of the scholars' is shari'ah]. And how can the gnostics and the jurists be the same, when Allah has said, 'the noblest among you in Allah's sight is the most God-conscious?'"<sup>237</sup>

Having said all this, it is very important to note that the two roles have many overlapping features. Very many Sufis have been great ulama and vice-versa. In the final analysis, any shaykh needs must possess certain pre-requisite qualities (these have been listed and explained in earlier chapters). We therefore would humbly suggest that the seeker should ensure that the one he wishes to be his shaykh has the correct qualifications for the task.

### ECSTATIC UTTERANCES

To many people, tasawwuf is equated with the controversial statements of famous Sufi figures such as Mansur al-Hallaj ('I am the Truth'), Abu Yazid al-Bistami ('How great is my majesty') and Junaid al-Baghdadi ('beneath my cloak is nothing except God'). Taken out of context, these utterances have been seized upon as examples of shirk and kufr by the opponents of tasawwuf. However, as with all things, such statements need to be viewed in context. They are known in Sufi terminology as '*shahtiyyah*' (spiritual boasting) and arise exclusively from a state of *wajd* (spiritual ecstasy).

When a Sufi, through his constant remembrance and faithful

<sup>236</sup> Let it be noted that this is not our own view, but that of the mujaddid Imam himself, and moreover an opinion confirmed by ibn Hanbal, al-Ghazzali, al-Qushayri, an-Nawawi and others among the verifying mujtahid scholars

<sup>237</sup> Fatawa al-Izz ibn Abd as-Salam

devotion, is rewarded by his Lord with the all-encompassing vision of Allah or consciousness of His awesome Presence, the experience can be utterly overwhelming. It brings about, quite understandably, a state of intense, uncontrollable rapture. The attempt to translate this encounter with the Infinite, this ineffable communion, into the limitations of mortal language invariably causes controversy. The ocean cannot be poured into a teacup. The effacement of the Sufi's personality within the overpowering Presence of Allah, as allusively discussed in the hadith al-qudsi of Qurb an-Nawaafil, brings the Sufi to an entirely new understanding of 'la ilaha illa-Allah' - 'nothing truly exists except for Allah.'

A detailed discussion of these issues is far beyond the scope of the present work - or any work, for that matter, as it is something that can only be correctly understood once actually experienced. The concepts of *wahdat al-wujud* and *wahdat ash-shuhud* (Unity of existence and perception) fall under the same elevated and specialized category.

Nevertheless, one should beware of falling into simple-minded misunderstandings on the issue of the spiritual utterances of the Sufis. Suffice to say that the Sufis, the friends of Allah - may Allah bless them and those that remain in their company - are far elevated above the shirk and kufr that is disingenuously ascribed to them. In their state of ecstasy they are legally considered *ma'dhur* (excused) and their utterances are not taken literally. They fall under the category of statements referred to in the following hadith,

"[regarding one who finds his camel and provisions after thinking them lost in the desert] ... and in the extremity of his happiness he exclaims, 'Oh Allah! You are my servant and I am Your Lord!' His error was due to his rapture [and he is excused]..."<sup>238</sup>

If this is the state of one who regains his material goods, what can be said of the happiness of a man who has found the everlasting

<sup>238</sup> Muslim



external knowledge taken from his Fatawa al-Izz bin Abd as-Salam.<sup>236</sup>

"No reasonable person doubts that the knowers of Allah [the Sufis] ...are not only better than the knowers of Allah's rulings [the ulema], but also better than those of the branches and roots of religion [the mujtahids], because the rank of a science is according to its object. [ie: the object of the Sufis' knowledge is Allah, whereas that of the scholars' is shari'ah]. And how can the gnostics and the jurists be the same, when Allah has said, 'the noblest among you in Allah's sight is the most God-conscious?'"<sup>237</sup>

Having said all this, it is very important to note that the two roles have many overlapping features. Very many Sufis have been great ulama and vice-versa. In the final analysis, any shaykh needs must possess certain pre-requisite qualities (these have been listed and explained in earlier chapters). We therefore would humbly suggest that the seeker should ensure that the one he wishes to be his shaykh has the correct qualifications for the task.

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238 Muslim



Lord of Majesty and Grace (*dhul Jalali wa'l Ikram*), the source of all his sustenance and blessing, after wandering through the desert of this world?

The course of wisdom regarding these issues is neither to interpret nor to judge, for the statement is beyond our understanding, and the state (of the speaker) is far beyond our reach. The Sufis are the foremost among the ummat al-Muhammadiyah in the knowledge of Allah's Unity (tawhid); and in this condition, we leave their secrets to their Lord. One should not let the ecstatic sayings of the Sufis – attempts to describe the indescribable, capture the Ineffable and reveal the Hidden Mystery – distract one from the goal of tasawwuf. This is neither vision nor state, neither ecstasy nor inspiration, but the perfection of sincerity and worship. This is what the Sufis, to a man, have taught from earliest times up to the present day.

#### SUFI HADITH NARRATION

Reading through the works of great Sufis such as Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and others, one often comes across ahadith that are not narrated in any of the authentic collections. This has led scholars and lay people alike to conclusions such as, 'the Sufis narrate baseless hadith,' 'the Sufis are careless in narration,' or even, 'the Sufis forge hadith for their own ends.' This has become so common in our times, especially with the upsurge in anti-tasawwuf sentiment aroused by the Wahhabi school, that scholars have felt the need to answer it.

There are many reports of Sufis who have, during their communion and mystical conversations with Rasulullah ﷺ, narrated or confirmed some of his sayings as hadith. Why should they not, when after all, they came from him, and it is impossible for anyone to imitate the form of Rasulullah ﷺ in a dream or vision? The communion (suhba) with Rasulullah ﷺ enjoyed by many Sufis and great ulama is an undoubted fact acknowledged by all scholars

as being supported by scripture (with the exception of the Mu'tazila and the most extreme Salafis), so we will not debate this.

Furthermore, no less a scholar than Imam as-Suyuti reported having been blessed with the vision of Rasulullah ﷺ twenty-two times, and having questioned him regarding the authenticity of certain hadith.<sup>239</sup> Many other Sufis and scholars have reported similar instances. In fact, it is reported that some muhaddithin themselves used to narrate hadith to the great Sufi Ruzbihan Baqlit in order for him to verify them directly with Rasulullah ﷺ.

It is important to note that Sufi hadith without externally verifiable chains of transmission cannot be accepted in relation to issues of fiqh (ie: they cannot alter shari'ah). This is because of the finality of revelation as attested to in Allah's words, "*Today I have completed for you your religion.*"<sup>240</sup> However, they can be accepted as explanations or commentaries, as well as in spheres relating to the hereafter, Allah and his Rasul ﷺ, good character, or the nature of reality. This is because the Sufis are among the Siddiqin – the people of truth and reality – and are among the most trustworthy of narrators. It is well known that the famous wird known as 'the Litany of the Sea' (*Hizb al-Bahr*) was dictated by Rasulullah ﷺ directly to Imam Abu'l Hasan al-Shadhili.

#### DHIKR – THE CONTENTMENT OF THE HEART

*"Undoubtedly, in the remembrance of God do hearts find peace..."*<sup>241</sup>

Both those who are mureeds, and those who are not, invariably find themselves returning to one question – why does the shaykh place so much emphasis on dhikr? The enormous merits of dhikr have been exhaustively mentioned in both Qur'an and hadith.

239 Tadrib ar-Rawi

240 Sura al-Ma'idah, v 3

241 Sura ar-Ra'd, v 28



Furthermore, many great scholars have written entire books on the subject. Excellent English-language books include 'Virtues of Dhikr', by Shaykh Zakariyyah al-Kandhalawi, as well as the incomparable Ihya Ulum ad-Deen of Imam Ghazzali.

In the face of such authoritative writings on the subject, we do not see the need to add further comment except to quote three verses of the Holy Qur'an. The first verse is: "And undoubtedly the remembrance (dhikr) of Allah is the greatest (of all things)."<sup>242</sup> It is an universally applicable verse whose meaning is clearly apparent (zahir). It refers to all types of dhikr, and emphasises that its performance is greater than any other deed or striving.

The second is as follows, "Indeed, he has (already) attained salvation who purifies (his soul), and recites the name of his Lord (in abundance) and prays."<sup>243</sup> One should note here that Allah specifically refers to the recitation of His Blessed Name (dhakara isma Rabbihi) – as opposed to more general means of remembrance – as a condition for salvation. In fact, this ayah very neatly answers the question posed. Allah has purposefully linked salvation (the goal of tasawwuf) to the purification of the soul (the aim of peeri-mureedi), as well as to dhikr and prayer (the primary means of tasawwuf).

The final ayah is the one mentioned at the head of the section. It is similarly self-explanatory, and those constant practitioners of the art can testify to its truth. One of the less apparent meanings of this ayah, however, is linguistic. Non-Arabic speakers usually do not understand the subtleties and nuances of the Arabic words used in the Qur'an, and it is for this reason that we see fit to mention it here. The word for 'finding peace' used in the ayat is *tatma'inna*. The root word means 'peace, calm, serenity, and harmony – an absence of conflict.'<sup>244</sup> Interestingly, though, it also comes from exactly the

242 al-Ankabut, (29:45)

243 Sura al-Alaa, (82:14-15)

244 Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Arabic

same root as *mutma'innah*, which is used in the Qur'an to denote the highest spiritual state that the soul can attain.

Thus the ayah could also be translated as follows: "in the remembrance of Allah can hearts attain the highest spiritual rank." This, if nothing else, is one of reasons that the Sufis place so much emphasis on the performance of dhikr. In a hadith quoted earlier, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said that in gatherings of dhikr one should graze to the heart's content. Although this is an English idiom, and not a literal translation of the Arabic text, it applies rather well to the discussion. Dhikr nourishes and contents the soul in the same way as food nourishes and satisfies the body. Dhikr is the polish of the soul; there is nothing that cleanses the heart more effectively than its constant performance. Shaykh al-Kabbani declares,

"dhikr is the most excellent act of Allah's servants, and is stressed over one hundred times in the Holy Qur'an. It is the flag of Islam, the polished heart, the essence of the science of faith, the immunization against hypocrisy, the foremost worship and the key of all success ... the one who engages in dhikr has the highest rank of all before Allah."<sup>245</sup>

#### A SUMMARY

This entire book can be re-iterated as follows. The purpose of peeri-mureedi is to guide one in the ways of tasawwuf; and the explicit aim of tasawwuf is to purify the heart of all forms of evil which veil one from Allah. In summary, therefore, peeri-mureedi is essential for success in tasawwuf, and tasawwuf is essential for the success of one's religious quest. As Allah has said,

*'On the Day that neither family nor wealth will avail, save for one who comes to Allah with a purified heart.'*<sup>246</sup>

245 The Encyclopedia of Islamic Doctrine, vol 2

246 Sura ash-Shu'ara, v 88



## APPENDIX C - THE RISALAH AL-QUSHAYRIYYAH

The Risalah al-Qushayriyyah is one of the most famous of all manuals of tasawwuf. It was written by the great early Sufi master Abu'l Qasim Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri, in the style of an epistle. This popular literary form was designed to disclose a lifetime of practical wisdom in a few brief words. Al-Qushayri reserves the closing chapter of his testament for advice to disciples. Commenting on this, Ernst, the translator of the Risalah, says,

"One of the cornerstones of the Sufi tradition was the master-disciple relationship, which over time was the means of insuring that the spiritual blessings given to the Prophet Muhammad would continue from generation to generation. This relationship was probably the most important topic of Sufi handbooks."<sup>247</sup>

### THE TESTAMENT TO DISCIPLES

The master and teacher al-Qushayri said:

'We wanted to conclude this treatise with points of advice for disciples. We hope that Allah Almighty will assist them to apply these successfully. The first step on this path for the disciple is sincerity, so that his foundation will be set on a correct principle ... The principles of tasawwuf are the most correct principles, their masters are the greatest of men, and the Sufi scholars are the most learned of men.

When a disciple is establishing a covenant between himself and Allah, it is necessary for him to acquire knowledge of religious law,

<sup>247</sup> Teachings of Sufism

either by experience or by asking the masters. Tasawwuf has no practice but reliance upon the truth of God.

It is necessary for a disciple to study with a master, and if he does not have a master, he will never succeed. Abu Yazid said, "One who has no master has Satan for a leader." Abu Ali<sup>248</sup> said, "the tree that grows by itself without a gardener puts forth leaves, but it does not grow fruit. Similar is the disciple who has no master from whom he can learn his path, one breath at a time. He remains a worshipper of his own desire and does not attain success."

It is necessary for him to turn back to Allah and to turn away from every sin. He must give up all sins; both open and hidden, great and small. He strives to satisfy his opponents first, for one who does not satisfy his opponents receives nothing from this path.<sup>249</sup>

And when a master leads someone, it is necessary to instruct him in the formula of recollection [wazifah] that he deems appropriate for him. The master orders him to recite that name of Allah with his tongue, then tells him to put his heart in harmony with his tongue. He says to him, 'persist in continuous recitation of this as though you are eternally with your Lord in your heart, so that no other name but this will be upon your tongue.'

It is not part of the ethics of disciples to perform numerous litanies, for the Sufis are occupied with clearing their minds of thoughts, remedying their character and banishing heedlessness from their hearts, not with repetitive acts of piety. What is indispensable for them is the performance of both religious duties and optional practices.

The chief possession of the disciple is forbearance with everyone, good nature, meeting whatever he meets with satisfaction, patience during suffering and poverty, and giving up questioning and resistance, both in dearth [scarcity] and abundance.

<sup>248</sup> That is, Abu Ali ad-Daqqaq, al-Qushayri's own murshid.

<sup>249</sup> Meaning, he must keep his obligations towards mankind, especially those who bear enmity towards him. This selfless service of mankind is one of the foundations of Sufi teachings, especially of the Chishtiyyah order.



## APPENDIX D - BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES

Know that the most harmful thing for a disciple is to seek familiarity with the deceptive tests ... and Allah's gift to him of saying, '*I have distinguished you by this and singled you out from your fellows*.'<sup>250</sup>

It is incumbent upon the disciple, if his path is service to the faqirs, that he should patiently bear their rough treatment of him. Ibn Furak said, '*if you can't bear the blow, why become an anvil?*' It is incumbent upon the disciple to keep a distance from worldly people. Association with them is a dangerous poison.

This is our testament to the disciples. We ask generous God to grant them success, and not to place any evil upon us.

Rasulullah ﷺ was reported to have said, '*This religion is a weighty matter, so beware from whom you it.*'<sup>251</sup> It will no doubt have been noticed that much of the present book is taken up by the opinions and quotations of some of the most renowned orthodox scholars of Islam. This, in fact, was the express point of its composition – to air the views on tasawwuf and peeri-mureedi of the great luminaries of Islamic history. These are the imams and leaders of deen, who have devoted their lives to the pursuit of knowledge, respected in their own time and afterwards for their learning, wisdom, piety and taqwa.

It has been said that the most important science for any seeker of wisdom to master is the knowledge of its sources. If we do not know the qualifications and status of those upon whom we rely, our own claims of knowledge are on very shaky ground indeed. It is for this reason that there now follow brief biographical sketches of every scholar whose opinion has been quoted in the preceding pages (aside from the sahaba and the compilers of the most famous books of hadith). It is hoped that this, together with the bibliography, will assure the reader about the authenticity of the opinions quoted in this book. They are indeed the views of the greatest scholars of every age of Islam.

A quick note on terminology should help the reader to gain an understanding of some of the titles used. These were originally coined by scholars to denote specific levels of learning, but have since been used to describe anyone and everyone. Here they are used in their formal senses. It should also be noted that one is

250 That is, it is catastrophic for a mureed to take pride in his achievements (spiritual or otherwise).

251 A maqtu' hadith (missing out two narrators) reported by Ibn Sirin, the great tabi'i jurist and master of dream interpretation. It is also authentically ascribed to 'Umar.



acclaimed as a Shaykh al-Islam, for example, not by oneself, nor by one's followers, but by the consensus of one's contemporary scholars and those who have come after them.

**MUJTAHID:** A jurist who has attained mastery of the principles of law such that he is able to judge a strong legal opinion from a weak one, either within or between madhabs, basing his reasoning upon the accepted methodology of the school. It implies expert proficiency in hadith, tafsir, fiqh and language. There are various grades of mujtahid, the lowest being a mufti and the highest being a mujtahid al-mutlaq. In the context of the scholars listed here, it refers to a mujtahid fi'l madhab – the second highest rank of ijtihad – a scholar who has attained complete mastery of the principles of one of the Imams.

**MUJTAHID AL-MUTLAQ:** The highest possible rank of legal deduction. It refers to a jurist who has attained such perfection in every Islamic science that he is able to form an absolutely independent opinion and deduce shari'ah rulings only from the primary source texts of Islam (Qur'an and Sunnah). The most famous examples are, of course, the Four Imams.

**SHAYKH AL-ISLAM:** An honorific title that carries the same basic meaning as a mujtahid. Mastery in more than one field of Islamic lore is the minimum pre-requisite for this rank.

**HADITH MASTER:** A specialist in the science of hadith and their criticism. Usually has memorized at least 25,000 hadith with their chains of transmission. It is used as an honorific to denote the leading hadith scholars of a generation. The term 'shaykh al-hadith' refers to the foremost hadith scholar in a teaching institution.

**HAFIZ AL-HADITH:** A hadith master of extraordinary caliber, who has memorized over 100,000 hadith with their chains of transmission. There are perhaps one or two in each generation and none currently living.<sup>252</sup>

**MUJADDID:** A scholar or Sufi recognized (not necessarily

252 The Salafi scholar al-Albani's claims to have attained this rank are not considered valid outside his own followers, because of his numerous mistakes and errors

universally) as one of those referred to in the hadith in Musnad Ahmad, "every hundred years will arise one who will renew (yujaddidu) Islam." To be regarded as a mujaddid is the highest possible honor that any Muslim could hope to attain.

## THE LUMINARIES OF ISLAM <sup>253</sup>

**MUJAHID** ibn Jabr al-Makki (d104) The great tabi'i scholar, he was the main pupil of the sahaba mufassir Ibn Abbas and one of the earliest authorities on tafsir literature. He was reported to have asked Ibn Abbas the reason of revelation for every ayah, and to have gone through the Qur'an with him three times.

**HASAN** al-Basri ibn Yasar Abu Said (d110). The great mujtahid, imam of Basra, the greatest scholar and ascetic of the tabi'een. He was considered by the salaf to be an abdal and one of the earliest 'formal' Sufis. Three of the great Sufi orders arise through him, including the Chishtiyyah.

**AS-SADIQ** Abu Abdullah Jafar bin Muhammad (d148). The great Imam, descendant of Sayyidina Ali and founder of the Jafari madhab. Renowned for his immense wisdom and towering piety, he counted among his pupils the Imams Abu Hanifah and Malik.

**ABU HANIFAH** Numan bin Thabit al-Kufi (d150). The Greatest Imam, mujtahid al-mutlaq and founder of the Hanafi madhab. He was the first of the great imams of fiqh and the only tabi'i among them. He passed away and lies buried in Kufah, where a great seminary now exists.

**AT-THAWRI** Sufyan al-Kufi (d161). One of mujtahid imams and Sufis of the salaf. He was schooled in tasawwuf by Abu Hashim as-Sufi (d115). A companion of Abu Hanifah, he founded his own madhab, which was later assimilated into the main schools.

**IBN ADHAM** Ibrahim Abu Ishaq al-Balkhi (d165). One of the great early Sufis, a prince of Balkh who renounced his throne for the ascetic path to Allah. A respected narrator, he was martyred in a

253 Listed chronologically.



naval expedition.

**MALIK** Abu Abdullah ibn Anas al-Madani (d179). Founder of the Maliki madhab and mujtahid al-mutlaq. He authored the first comprehensive book of jurisprudence, al-Muwatta', which was called, 'the most beneficial book after the Qur'an.' He was the teacher of Imams Shafi'i and ash-Shaybani. He was also widely known as a great lover of Rasulullah r. His teachers in tasawwuf included Ja'far as-Sadiq.

**RABIA** al-Adawiyya (d185). One of the greatest exponents of early tasawwuf who counted among her students Malik bin Dinar, Habib al-Ajami and other early Sufi masters. She is most famous for her asceticism, tawakkul, connection with Allah but for formalizing and popularizing the priority of unconditional divine love.

**AL-FUDHAYL** Abu Ali bin Ayaz al-Talaqani (d187). A highwayman before his conversion to the mystic path, he resided in Makkah and became a traditionist of great repute. One of the great early Sufis, he shamed the caliph Harun al-Rashid to tears with his forthright and fearless admonitions.

**ASH-SHAYBANI** Muhammad bin al-Hasan (d189). Mujtahid al-Mutlaq and the foremost pupil of Imams Abu Hanifah and Abu Yusuf. He is one of the two pillars of the Hanafi madhab and responsible for systematizing and expounding its rulings. He studied under Malik and taught fiqh to Shafi'i.

**AL-MARUF** Abu Mahfuz bin Firuz al-Kharkhi (d200). A great Sufi master of Baghdad, and one of the founders of the Baghdad Circle, he is said to have accepted Islam at the hands of Musa al-Kadhim, the Imam and son of Jafar as-Sadiq.

**ASH-SHAFI'I** Muhamad bin Idris al-Hashimi (d204). The founder of the Shafi'i madhab, Sufi saint, mujtahid al-mutlaq, and the first to systematize the principles of jurisprudence. Mujaddid of the second Islamic century, his madhab is the most consistent in its rulings largely because of his clear-cut principles of derivation. Passed away in Egypt.

**AT-TAHIRA** Sayyidah Nafisa bint al-Hasan (d208). A great saint, teacher of fiqh and tasawwuf to some of the greatest Sufis and scholars of the salaf, such as Imam Shafi'i, al-Afwadi and Dhun-Nun al-Misri. She was known as 'the mistress of the people of fiqh,' and 'lady of miracles.' She led a female janazah salaah and administered Imam Shafi'i's estate after his death as per his request.

**ABD AR-RAZZAQ** (d211). One of the early hadith masters; Imams Bukhari and Muslim took narrations from him. His musannaf is one of the earliest surviving authentic collections of hadith. The most famous hadith he narrates is probably, 'the first thing Allah created was nur al-Muhammadiyah...'

**AL-HAFI** Abu Nasr Bishr ibn al-Harith (d227). A great early Sufi, he studied traditions in Baghdad before abandoning all worldly trappings (hence his nickname: the Bare-footed). He was greatly admired by Ibn Hanbal and the caliph al-Ma'mun.

**IBN HANBAL** Abu Abdullah Ahmad ash-Shaybani (d241). Founder of the Hanbali madhab, mujtahid al-mutlaq, hafiz al-hadith and upholder of the Sunnah in the face of the Mu'tazilah heresy. He was a pupil of Imam Shafi'i, who in turn studied hadith under him. Major misinterpretation of his madhab has unfortunately led to modern 'neo-orthodox Hanbali' scholars condemning virtually every other Islamic scholar in history as either kuffar or ahl al-bid'ah.

**AL-MUHASIBI** al-Harith bin Asad (d243). One of the great Sufi masters and writers of the salaf and the teacher of al-Junaid. Imam Bin Hanbal's awe upon hearing him speak led him to say, 'no-one speaks about the knowledge of Reality (ilm al-Haqa'iq) like al-Muhasibi.'

**DHUN-NUN** Thauban bin Ibrahim al-Misri (d245). The famous Egyptian mystic, one of the greatest of the early Sufis. His beautiful aphorisms have been preserved.

**ABU YAZID** Tayfur ibn Isa al-Bistami (d261). One of the greatest early Sufi authorities and masters. Many miracles and ecstatic utterances are reported from him, and he was one of the first to at-



tempt a systematization of Sufi metaphysics.

**JUNAID** Abu'l Qasim ibn Muhammad al-Baghdadi (d298). One of the foundational figures of tasawwuf, and the leader of the famous 'Baghdad Circle.' He elaborated a theosophical doctrine that determined the course of orthodox mysticism.

**AL-HALLAJ** Husain bin Mansur (d309). The controversial Sufi mystic, he is most widely known for the cruelty of his execution following his ecstatic utterance 'I am the Truth.' He was a pupil of al-Junaid, though he followed the 'intoxicated' school of al-Bestami.

**AT-TABARI** Muhammad ibn Jarir (d310). A Mujtahid al-Mutlaq, imam and founder of a madhab that lasted 150 years. A hadith master and historian, he was renowned for his massive tafsir, which was the greatest of the early commentaries, and his universal history (at-Ta'rikh).

**AT-TAHAWI** Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Azdi (d321). Among the outstanding early authorities in fiqh and hadith. He was a mujtahid imam of the Hanafi school, as well as a hadith master whose works such as 'Sharh Ma'ni al-Athar' and 'Mushkil al-Athar' are still indispensable. Most well-known for his 'Aqidah' which clearly spells out the basic doctrine of the Ahl as-Sunnah.

**AL-ASH'ARI** Ali ibn Isma'il Abu'l Hasan (d324). The great Imam of aqidah, al-Haytami defined the Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jamaah as being, 'those who follow the theology of al-Asha'ri...' He authored nearly three hundred books and maintained a middle way between the Mu'tazilah and the Mujassamah which has become the norm for the Ahl as-Sunnah.

**IBN ABI HATIM** Abd ar-Rahman (d327). Pupil and scribe of Imam Bukhari, he also authored a work of tafsir. One of the early scholars of hadith, he wrote the Taqdimah, a work on the science of hadith criticism.

**SHIBLI** Abu Bakr ibn Ja'far al-Baghdadi (d334). A leading Sufi and a Maliki faqih, he was the Imam of the people of inward knowledge. Part of the famous 'Baghdad Circle' and one of the founders of 'ecstatic Sufism,' he was also a respected narrator of hadith.

**IBN HIBBAN** Muhammad Abu Hatim al-Busti (d352). A leading early hafiz al-hadith and Shafi'i imam, he compiled a musnad according to al-Bukhari's principles, and a biographical work.

**AT-TABARANI** Abu'l Qasim Sulayman al-Isfahani (d360). A Palestinian hafiz al-hadith and Qur'anic commentator, he compiled three widely-used collections of hadith, the practically named Mu'jamaah (Lexicons - short, medium and long). He taught hadith for sixty of his one hundred years.

**AD-DAQQAQ** Abu Bakr Abu Ali (d405). The great Sufi, master of al-Qushayri and Abu Sa'id. He founded of a Sufi center in Nishapur called Khanqah al-Sarawi.

**ABU NU'AYM** Ahmad bin Abdullah al-Isfahani (d430). One of the most respected of the early hadith masters. Hafiz al-Hadith and master of Shafi'i jurisprudence, he compiled the massive Hilyat al-Auliya, a reference-work of hadith and sayings of early Sufi masters, and a musannaf.

**AL-BAYHAQI** Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn al-Husain (d458). A Shafi'i mujtahid and hafiz al-hadith of Nishapur, compiler of hadith works like 'the branches of Faith' and 'as-Sunan al-kubra'. According to ad-Dhababi, 'he could have founded his own madhab.'

**AL-HUJWIRI** Ali ibn Uthman al-Ghaznawi Data Gang Baksh (d464). The great Sufi author, he was a spiritual inheritor through three shaykhs of al-Junaid. He authored the earliest known Persian manual of tasawwuf - and the most widely-known in English - 'Kashf al-Mahjub.' He was also a master of fiqh, kalam, hadith and Qur'anic commentary.

**AL-QUSHAYRI** Abu'l-Qasim Abd al-Karim (d465). A Shafi'i hadith master and exegete, most well-known for his 'Risalah al-Qushayriyyah', one of the most important early systematic works on tasawwuf.

**AL-GHAZALI** Muhammad Abu Hamid al-Tusi (d505). The universally acknowledged mujaddid of the fifth century, and mujtahid al-mutlaq. He authored masterworks in every field of Islamic knowledge. One of the greatest thinkers in all of human history, he



irrevocably proved the inter-dependency of tasawwuf and fiqh. His contributions were pivotal to subsequent Islamic thought.

**AL-ZAMAKH'SHARI** Abu'l-Qasim Mahmud ibn 'Umar (d538). A theologian and grammarian of Samarkand. Despite his clear Mu'tazilah leanings, he was titled 'Allamah (the great scholar)' by his contemporaries. His grammatical and philosophical commentary 'al-Kashaf' was widely renowned and formed the basis for al-Baydawi's famous tafsir.

**QADI IYAD** Abu al-Fadl bin Musa al-Malik (d544). The great Maliki faqih, Sufi and hafiz al-hadith, he is most famous for his 'ash-Shifa', the authoritative and well-loved celebration of the blessedness of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

**AL-JILANI** al-Ghauth al-Azam Muyhiudeen Abd al-Qadir (d561). The greatest of all Sufi masters, mujtahid Hanbali jurist and founder of the Qadiriyya silsilah. He was regarded as the mujaddid of the sixth century. Many examples of his profound wisdom are available in translations of his spiritual discourses.

**IBN ASAKIR** Ali ibn al-Hasan, Abu al-Qasim al-Dimashqi al-Shafi'i al-Ash'ari (d571). The imam of hadith masters on his time and historian of Damascus, he authored Tabyin Kadhif al-Muftari and was a prolific writer.

**IBN AL-JAWZI** Abu al-Faraj ibn al-Qurashi (d597). He was, with Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, the imam of Hanbalis of Baghdad. A hadith master, philologist, commentator of Qur'an, mujtahid jurist and historian, he ordered the Hanbali madhab into a systematic body of thought.

**AL-BAQLI** Ruzhiban al-Shirazi (d605). A great Persian Sufi, he authored a number of mystic texts, including a Qur'anic commentary and a diary of his spiritual experiences.

**ATTAR** Farid ad-deen (d628). The great Persian poet and biographer of the Sufis, he is most well-known for his allegorical 'manatiq al-tayr' (a Conference of Birds) and his 'tadhkirat al-auliya,' a biographical reference for the lives of Sufi saints. He was martyred by the Mongols.

**AL-CHISHTI** Khwaja Muin ad-Deen Hasan Gharib an-Nawaz (d633). The great Sufi founder of the Chishtiyyah silsilah, he ensured the establishment of Islam in Northern India through forty years of preaching, during which time he converted nearly a million people to Islam.

**IBN ARABI** Muhammad ibn Ali Muhyi ad-Deen al-Andalusi (d638). One of the greatest and certainly most controversial Sufis of the khalaf, he was best known for his systematization of Sufi metaphysics, and his books 'Futuh al-Makkiyyah' and 'Fusus al-Hikam'. Misunderstanding of his metaphysic is common, but he is considered an undoubted saint and mujtahid by, among others, as-Suyuti, ibn Abd as-Salam, an-Nawawi, ibn Hajar, as-Sakhawi, al-Baydawi, al-Munawi and many other great scholars.

**AL-'IZZ** Abd al-Aziz bin Abd as-Salam (d660). Mujtahid Shafi'i imam and companion of the Sufi master Abu'l Hasan ash-Shadili. He compiled a major work of usul, 'Qawa'id al-Ahkam,' and was recognized as a Mujaddid Imam.

**AL-QURTUBI** Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Ansari (d671). The great Maliki jurist and hadith master, he was achieved enduring fame for his monumental legal tafsir 'al-Jami', which has been used extensively ever since. He was a Sufi and ascetic, admired for his simplicity and sanctity.

**RUMI** Jalal ad-Deen (d672). The greatest of all mystical poets, he authored the Mathnavi, which scholars have called, 'the Qur'an in Persian,' for its unmatched beauty, as well as several other works of genius.

**AL-NAWAWI** Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn Sharaf (d676). A mujtahid jurist, Sufi saint, Mujaddid of the sixth century and hadith master of the khalaf. His recension of Shafi'i fiqh is recognized as the most authentic, and his commentary of Sahih Muslim is still widely used. A major influence on Ibn Hajar, apart from whom he is considered to have had no peer in hadith scholarship.

**AL-AZDI** Ibn Abu Jamra al-Andalusi (d695). The seventh century hafiz al-hadith of Andalus, he is most famous for his great com-



mentary of al-Bukhari entitled, 'Bahjat an-Nufus Sharh Mukhtasar Sahih al-Bukhari.'

**NIZAM AD-DEEN** Muhammad bin Ahmad Mahboob Ilahi (d725). The great Sufi master, he presided over the zenith of the Chishtiyyah in India. His ceaseless worship, devotion to the poor, administrative genius and out-spoken condemnation of oppression and corruption were legendary.

**AMIR KHUSRO** Abu'l Hasan Yamin ad-Deen (d725). The legendary Indian polymath, he was an intellectual giant distinguished as a poet, scholar, composer, musician, linguist, inventor and swordsman. His love for his murshid Nizam ad-Deen Auliya was legendary, such that he died forty days after the latter's demise.

**IBN TAYMIYYAH** Taqi ad-Deen Ahmad (d728). A profoundly learned but highly controversial scholar and preacher of Damascus. His mastery of fiqh, hadith, philosophy and other Islamic sciences made his deficiencies in understanding of aqida all the more surprising. His literalist interpretation of Allah's attributes earned him the unanimous condemnation of the ulema of his time.

**AL-DHABABI** Muhammad ibn Ahmad Shams al-Din al-Shafi'i of Damascus (d748). Shaykh al-Islam, he was a leading hadith master, an encyclopaedic historian and biographer, and authority in the canonical readings of the Qur'an. A star pupil of Ibn Taymiyyah, for whom he had great love and respect, though he disassociated himself from anthropomorphism and castigated his master in his 'Nasihah ad-Dhababiyya li-Ibn Taymiyyah.'

**IBN QAYYIM** Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr al-Dimashqi al-Hanbali, known as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751). Often confused with ibn al-Jawzi, who lived two hundred years earlier. A specialist in Qur'anic commentary, hadith, fiqh, usul, and Arabic grammar, he was the foremost disciple of Ibn Taymiyyah, whose anthropomorphic teachings he perpetuated. His 'Kitab ar-Ruh' ranks among the best understandings of the soul and the afterlife in Islamic literature (although it is condemned by the Salafis).

**AL-SAFADI** Salah ad-Deen (d764). Hadith master and pupil of

ad-Dhababi, he wrote a biographical dictionary entitled 'al-Wafi bi'l Wafayat.'

**IBN KATHIR** Abu'l Fid Isma'il al-Qurashi (d774). A great Shafi'i scholar, he was the author of one of the most prominent latter-day tafsirs and a hafiz al-hadith. A pupil of Ibn Taymiyyah in his younger days, he is considered a great scholar of the Ahl as-Sunnah and free of his teacher's anthropomorphism.

**AL-SHATIBI** Ibrahim ibn Musa al Maliki (d 790). Mujtahid jurist and master of the usuliyeen. His 'Muwafaqat' opened up the issue of the purposes (maqasid) of the shari'ah and broke new ground in the study of juristic principles (usul). A pupil of the great Sufi Abu'l Abbas al-Maqqari.

**IBN AL-JAZRI** Muhammad bin Muhammad (d791). Known by his contemporaries as 'Allamah', he was a hadith master of Damascus and author of the renowned book of Prophetic invocations, 'Hisn al-Haseen' (the strong fortress).

**IBN RAJAB** al-Hanbali (d795). Hafiz al-hadith, Sufi of the Qadiriyya silsilah and mujtahid scholar of the Hanbali madhab, he wrote a famous commentary on an-Nawawi's Forty Ahadith. A pupil of both ibn Taymiyyah and ibn Qayyim, he still represents the correct aqida of the Hanbaliyya as elucidated by Ibn al-Jawzi.

**IBN KHALDUN** Abd al-Karim al-Maghribi (d808). Historian, geographer, jurist of the Maliki madhab and author of the first known treatise on the philosophies of history, politics and sociology, 'al-Muqaddimah.'

**IBN HAJAR** Abu'l Fadl Ahmad al-Asqalani (d852). Hafiz al-hadith, shaykh al-Islam, Sufi, mujtahid Shafi'i jurist and undoubtedly the greatest of latter day hadith masters. His work Fath al-Bari is the greatest commentary of al-Bukhari ever written. He taught at the Sufi khanqah in Baybars for twenty years.

**AS-SAKHAWI** Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Rahman (d902). The great hafiz al-hadith was, aside from al-Suyuti, the greatest pupil of Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani.

**AS-SUYUTI** Jalal ad-Deen ibn Kamal ad-Deen al-Misri al-



Shafi'i (d911). Muṭahid al-muṭlaq, mujaddid of the tenth Islamic century, foremost hadith master, jurist, Sufi, philologist, and historian, he authored works in every Islamic science.

**IBN HAJAR** Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Haythami (d974). Regarded as a Shaykh al-Islam, he represents the foremost resource of legal opinions of the late Shafi'i school. Among his more famous works are 'fatawa al-hadithiyya' and 'tuhfa al-muhtaj'. He was schooled in tasawwuf by, among others, Abu'l-Hasan al-Bakri.

**IBN ABIDIN** Muhammad Amin ash-Shami (d1252). One of the greatest latter-day mujtahids of the Hanafis, he wrote the famed 'Hashiya Radd al-Muhtar', which is acclaimed 'the final word in Hanafi jurisprudence.'

**AL-TAWSAWI** Khwaja Sulayman al-Chishti (d1267). One of the most influential latter-day masters of the Chishtiyyah order in southern India, he was a prolific writer and renowned scholar.

**ALI SHAH** as-Sayyid Khwaja Habib al-Hyderabadi (d1323). The founder of the Habibiyyah silsilah, he was a great Sufi master and poet of southern India and the peer of Soofie Saheb, who pioneered tasawwuf to South Africa at the former's behest. He authored thirty works of formal tasawwuf.

**AL-JURDANI** Muhammad bin Abdallah al-Misri (d1331). Shafi'i scholar, author of a commentary on an-Nawawi's Forty Ahadith entitled, 'al-Jawahir al-lu'lu'yya fi sharh al-Arba'in al-Nawawiya' and other works of Shafi'i fiqh.

**KANDHALAWI** Muhammad Zakariyyah (d1346). Indian hadith master and Sufi of the Sabriyyah silsilah, though influenced somewhat by the diffusion of Wahhabi beliefs into India. He wrote prolifically, but is most famous among the ulama for his monumental *Awjaz al-Masalik*, and among the laity for his excellent 'Faza'il' books.

**MIA** Moulana Abid al-Uthmani (d?1370). Indian scholar and shaykh of the Naqshbandi silsilah. He authored several scholarly and mystical works including an exploration of the mysteries of salah entitled 'Mi'raj al-Mu'minin'. Originally from India, he lies bur-

ied in Ladysmith, South Africa.

**NA'IMI** Ahmad Yar Khan (d1394). Hanafi mujtahid, shaykh of tafsir and hadith master. He studied under many of the great shaykhs of India. He also authored many books including 'Jaa al-Haq', a contemporary defense of Orthodox beliefs, and two excellent works of tafsir.

**ABD AL-FATTAH** ibn Muhammad Abu Guddah (d1417). One of the most renowned of contemporary muhadditheen, master of usul and Hanafi fiqh. He taught in Syria and exerted a major influence on many Orthodox contemporary scholars.

#### CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARS

**AL-'ALWANI** Taha Jabir. A contemporary Shafi'i scholar, specialist in usul al-fiqh. He is a member of the Islamic Fiqh Academy of Jeddah, the president of the Fiqh Council of North America, and founder of the International Institute of Islamic Thought.

**HABIBI** Naseem Ashraf. One of the most senior South African hadith masters and Hanafi jurists, specializing in Arabic literature. He taught in the Jami'ah Habibiyya in Allahabad for ten years and was also given sanads in hadith from Muhammad bin 'Alawi of Makkah, one of the greatest living hadith masters.

**KABBANI** Muhammad Hisham an-Naqshbandi. A distinguished Islamic scholar and Sufi, he is the foremost khalifah of Nazim al-Haqqani, the supreme head of the Naqshbandi silsilah. His many scholarly works have earned him wide repute, and his 'Encyclopedia' is an indispensable contribution to English-language Islamic scholarship. He is also the founder and president of the ASFA, ICSA and other Sufi and charitable organizations and has pioneered the spread of Orthodox Islam and tasawwuf in America.

**ERNST** Carl W. Professor and chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina. He is a specialist in Islamic Mysticism and a translator of the works of classical Sufi masters.



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**HADDAD** Dr Gibril Fou`ad. Born in Beirut, he embraced Islam while a graduate student at Columbia University in New York. He has lived in Damascus since 1997 and specializes in the translation of classical Islamic texts. He is the mureed of Shaykh Ahmad Rifa`i and a pupil of Shaykh bin Alawi Makki, He works closely with the Naqshbandi Haqqani Movement and the As-Sunnah Foundation of America to promote Orthodox Islam.

**HASAN** Rafeek. A lecturer in comparative religion and spirituality, he was the founder of the Muslim Student's Association of South Africa, the Muslim Youth Academy and several publications. A pharmacist, he has been engaged in Islamic propagation and voluntary work for over thirty years. He is presently a director at the Islamic Propagation Centre International.

**KELLER** Nuh Ha Mim. American scholar, Sufi and specialist in Shafi'i jurisprudence, legal methodology (usul al-fiqh), and tenets of faith (aqida). His English translation of 'Umdat al-Salik is the first English-language Islamic legal work to receive the certification of al-Azhar.

**MURAD** Abd al-Hakim. English scholar teaching at Cambridge University, he was schooled in the traditional Islamic sciences at al-Azhar and under Imam Ahmad Mashhur al-Haddad and specializes in Ottoman Islam and Ghazali's works. Translator of a number of works, including al-Bayhaqi's 77 Branches of Faith and Books XXII and XL of the Ihya.

**SOOFIE** Muhammad Fuzail al-Habibi. A contemporary young scholar and speaker. He specializes in the study and translation of Persian and Urdu works of classical Sufi masters. He has authored several works of his own including, 'Seeker of the Beloved,' an introduction to Sufi practices.

## END NOTE

*My shaykh taught me this; I'm just passing on a message.*

*He is one of those who know.*

*Listen when these people speak, for they see with the eyes of Truth*

*And their speech is the echo of the prophets.*

*Their eyes are open to the Secret;*

*The ultimate Reality of all things.*

*Don't expect lectures from them, they're too busy remembering God*

*To waste their breath on anyone but Him.*

*So He remembers them, and does His work through them.*

*That's why their simple penetrating looks, or few quiet words,*

*Can pierce your soul to its uttermost depths;*

*Make you spin and dance in heaven-sent ecstasy*

*And hold more truth than the books of a hundred philosophers.*

*In their actions and their silences, in their laughter and their love*

*They remember the one for whose sake was forged Creation.*

*They'll make you remember him too -*

*Provided you're awake!*

*Don't sleep when you're with them!*

*You'll miss the secret they whisper.*

*And don't talk over-much!*

*No-one wants to hear a donkey's bray*

*When they're listening for the song of God's reed-flute.*

*So abide with them, love them, hold fast to their way.*

*Blind moles cannot reach heaven*

*Unless they cling to the feet of winged eagles.*

*If you want to stand in the high court of God,*

*Hide yourself beneath the cloak of His friends.*



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254 For the purposes of reference, the ism al-nisbah (the 'al') has been removed, so that, for example, al-Ghazzali would be written as Ghazzali.

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*"And follow the path of those who turn to Me in love, then surely with Me will be your journeys end."*

Tasawwuf is the term given to the Islamic science of ihsan - the perfection and purification of the soul. Its basis is the divine law, its path is self realisation and its purpose is the attainment of absolute sincerity. It is the inner dimension of Islam: the soul that moves it, the vital force that strengthens it and the breath that sustains it.

The path of Tasawwuf must be taken from a perfected and revered spiritual master, who guides one through the deadly snares of the Ego and the traps of the Devil. The bond between Master and pupil imitates the relationship between the Holy Prophet and his companions. It forms the basis and essence of Tasawwuf and is essential for any sincere seeker of Allah.

This book examines the importance of walking in the footsteps of the saintly and the righteous along the long and difficult path that leads to the ultimate reality. It unearths the Islamic origins of Tasawwuf and helps explain the nature and characteristics of the master pupil bond according to the classical scholars and luminaries of traditional Islam.

It is hoped that this work will help to revive an important somewhere that has all but forgotten by modern-day Muslims and reawaken in them the yearning for the age long quest for spiritual perfection.



Nur al-Habib  
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